



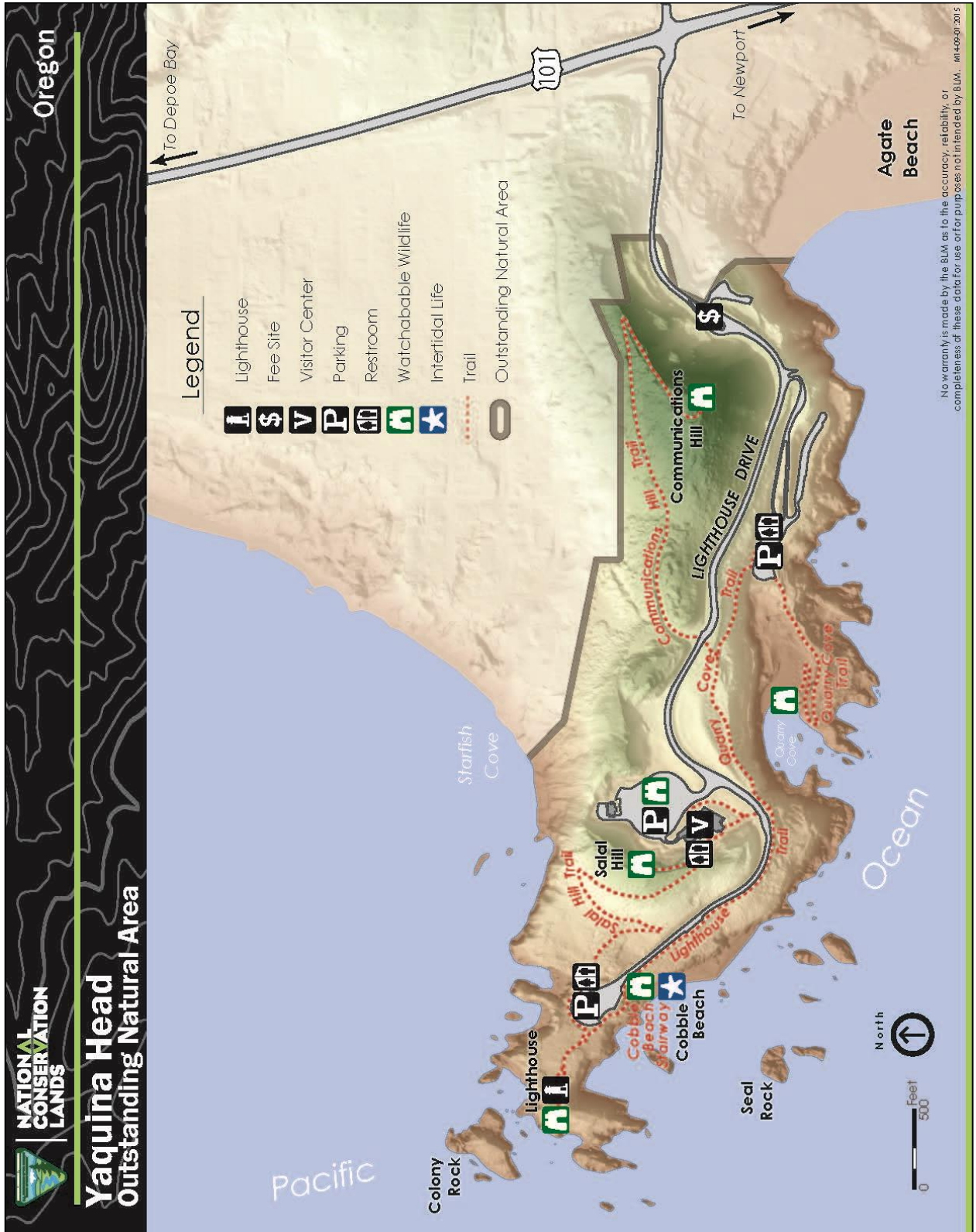
NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Oregon/Washington
2021: Annual Manager's Report

Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area



Map

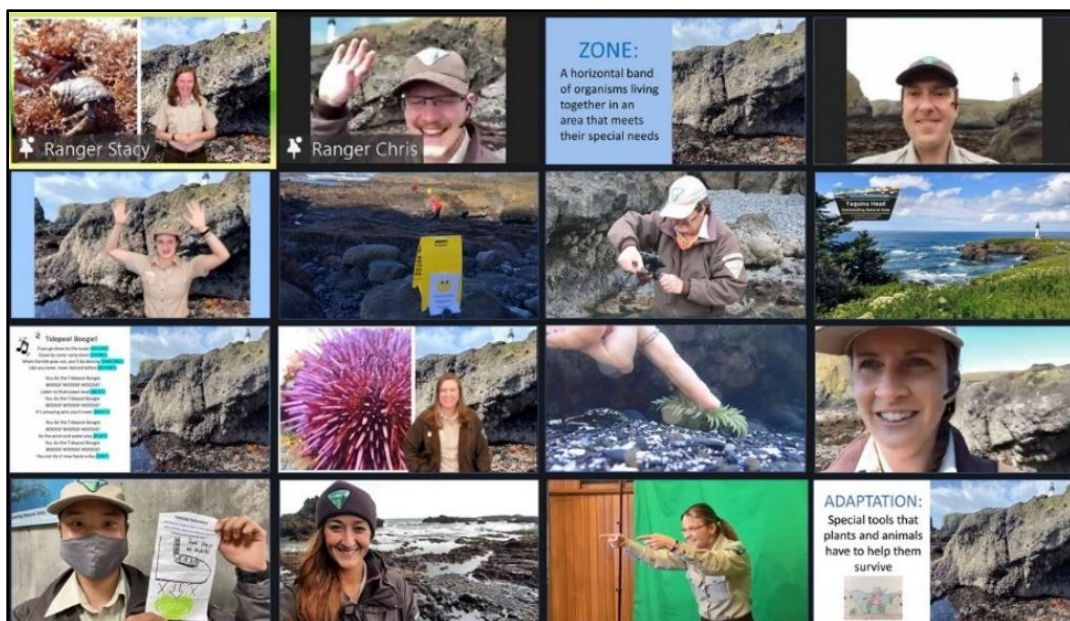


Accomplishments

Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area had many accomplishments during fiscal year (FY) 2021, despite on-going challenges presented by COVID-19. Two of this year's highlights include replacement of the observation deck and path at the lighthouse and a very successful adaptation of the education program to the virtual environment.

A beautiful new concrete deck with basalt rock walls replaced a 20-year-old deteriorating wood version. The BLM also redesigned and replaced a high maintenance asphalt path to the lighthouse with a concrete path that improves ADA accessibility and has the strength to support large equipment for continued restoration of the lighthouse.

This was the second year of virtual education programs at Yaquina Head. Yaquina Head staff built on the positive components from the 2020 program as they continued to improve their understanding of virtual technology. The education program worked with educators to support flexible learning activities, particularly for teachers and school groups whose field trips were cancelled due to the pandemic. The education curriculum links to local and national standards and promotes scientific thinking and exploration, with students participating in hands-on activities throughout the lesson. Yaquina Head provided 78 virtual programs to 1,443 students at 33 schools by streaming live digital education content. The education program received a BLM Director's Award for Teamwork because of these successful virtual programs.



Challenges

As a small and heavily visited recreation destination, Yaquina Head experiences episodes of traffic congestion at the entrance station, popular overlooks, and parking areas. During the summer of 2021, Yaquina Head, in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration Western Federal Lands Highway Division (FHWA-WFL), initiated a study to evaluate the sites' transportation system. The Yaquina Head Traffic Study will identify issues and potential solutions to address site needs, including operations at the entrance station, overall site circulation, multimodal accommodations with safety enhancements, parking management, electric vehicle charging, and congestion mitigation. When identifying potential improvements, the study will consider public and stakeholder input, environmental constraints, constructability challenges, and financial feasibility. The study is a collaboration between the FHWA-WFL, BLM, Oregon Department of Transportation, City of Newport, stakeholders, and the public to identify needs and potential solutions.

Another reoccurring challenge is maintaining staffing levels to support the education program and visitor services, including facility maintenance. Housing costs on the coast are very high, with many prior housing options converted into short-term rentals, which poses challenges for new seasonal staff and results in a high turnover rate for seasonal positions.



Visitors

From exploring tidepools teeming with life to seeing Oregon's tallest lighthouse, there is something for every visitor at Yaquina Head. Despite COVID-19 mitigation measures, including closing the Interpretive Center and lighthouse to the public, Yaquina Head visitation still approached an all-time high in 2021 with 454,438 visitors, almost reaching 2018's all-time high of 466,070 visitors.

Yaquina Head provides a variety of scenic coastal and wildlife viewpoints from which visitors may see whales, seals, and seabirds. As part of COVID-19 mitigation efforts, the Yaquina Head staff provided the public with self-guided information on ecology, natural systems, and cultural history targeting different age groups, needs, and interests. In FY 2021, Yaquina Head became a pilot site for Agents of Discovery, an educational mobile game application that lets BLM sites create interactive, location-based challenges to engage visitors. Through Agents of Discovery, Yaquina Head offers visitors multiple interactive, self-guided virtual tours through their cellphones.



Partnerships

Much of Yaquina Head's accomplishments are the result of partnerships, which include, but are not limited to:

- Oregon State University leads tidepool species monitoring, seabird monitoring, and climate change research at Yaquina Head.
- The Friends of Yaquina Lighthouses has a memorandum of understanding with the BLM allowing it to operate the bookstore in the interpretive center. In 2021, Friends of Yaquina Lighthouses also provided three high school age Tidepool Rangers to assist visitors at the tidepools.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has jurisdiction over the islands and rocks off the headland, which are part of the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge. These islands have also been designated by Congress as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. A 2020 memorandum of understanding with the USFWS strengthens the partnership within Interior Region 9 between Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area and the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex. This partnership will improve service to the public and focuses on shared stewardship goals, educating visitors about coastal resources, and addressing increasing recreation demands in the region.
- The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife administers the Yaquina Head Marine Garden, including Cobble Beach and the Quarry Cove Intertidal Area. The BLM monitors and helps manage use of these areas through a memorandum of understanding.



Science

Yaquina Head is a hub for scientific research on the Oregon coast. Each year, the BLM issues several science permits to multiple universities and agencies for research on wildlife biology, as well as oceanic and atmospheric data collection. During FY 2021, the BLM awarded Oregon State University a Management Studies Support Program grant to continue a long-term seabird monitoring project, which also includes a community science initiative that will enrich the visitor experience.

Seabirds are a cornerstone asset for Yaquina Head and are a primary feature of educational and recreational opportunities at this site. Yaquina Head and adjacent rocks provide habitat for one of the largest seabird colonies on the contiguous United States' western coast. The region's coastal waters support extensive commercial and recreational fisheries and ecotourism, including birdwatching. During the summer months, over 80,000 seabirds nest on or adjacent to Yaquina Head and use the coastal waters for foraging. Scientists have documented the importance of seabirds, including common murre, as indicators of ecosystem health, changing ocean conditions, and climate oscillations. Oregon State University's research contributes to the BLM's ability to effectively manage and conserve seabirds so that future generations may enjoy this spectacular viewing experience.



Climate Impacts

Climate change amplifies threats to the natural landscape, such as increasing the number and severity of wildfires. Rising temperatures and prolonged droughts in the Pacific Northwest are impacting the natural landscape in a number of ways. This includes more intense storms and extreme weather, as well as larger and more frequent wildfires. Recent wildfires in Oregon and California have resulted in sustained, dramatic effects to air quality that negatively impact the visitor experience. The picture below depicts wildfire smoke that smothered the Oregon coast for several weeks in 2020.

Yaquina Head partners with Oregon State University and the USFWS on data collection used to assess ecosystem response to variation in ocean climate and sea levels along the Oregon coast and Northern California Current System.



Climate Resiliency

The history of past land use plays an important role in future management at Yaquina Head. A large portion of the site was in the private domain since about 1866. During this period, the headland was grazed and seeded with livestock forage. In the early 20th century, rock quarrying resulted in the removal of a large portion of one of the two notable hills originally comprising Yaquina Head. Since designation as an Outstanding Natural Area in 1980, the site has recovered much of its natural and wild character primarily through passive restoration efforts. In FY 2021, initial work began to maintain open meadows and revegetate areas with native grasses and forbs to support pollinator species. Much of the physical labor was provided by volunteers from Friends of Yaquina Lighthouses and other partners.



Social and Environmental Justice

Yaquina Head continues to offer accessible and inclusive interpretative programs for the general public. During FY 2021, the BLM offered many virtual or socially distanced interpretive programs. In addition to providing virtual educational programming, the interpretive staff moved the annual Victorian Holiday Celebration online and developed an extensive video library with many types of historic-themed programming.

Yaquina Head has a legacy of working with the non-profit organization Environment for the Americas to promote a diverse staff and provide underserved groups with an internship opportunity in recreation and resource management. The intern helps to develop bilingual interpretive materials for the public and school groups and collects valuable research information on nesting seabirds. The pandemic continued to create challenges in workforce and housing, but Yaquina Head was able to find a wonderful 2021 Environment for the Americas intern.



Events

Each December, Yaquina Head puts on a Victorian Holiday Celebration, celebrating the winter holidays. This is a very popular evening event that brings the local community together with Victorian era music and crafts. The pandemic changed this event in FY 2021, with the BLM replacing the in-person event with a one-hour virtual experience. Over 100 online participants enjoyed a story read by a lightkeeper, a crafting demonstration, a sing-along, and interpretive vignettes on Victorian era holiday traditions and how lighthouse keeper families may have celebrated.

Feedback in the chat from the public during the event:

- "thank you for doing this"
- "great job everyone !! this is awesome..."
- "the Night Before Christmas Yaquina Head style.. love it!"
- "Thanks Stacy! carrying on the crafting tradition <3"
- "Stacy and Meredith you two are awesome!! Great job ❤️"
- "Very fun & good to move!" (after the song)
- "Thank you all for doing this--it was a very nice variety of activities and very well done!"



Final Thoughts

This year further confirmed the value of recreation and the innate need of our public to access areas of naturalness, especially during periods of stress. During this time, Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area boldly responded to the pandemic by providing safe and measured access to the site in a manner that reflected the shared goals of the BLM with state and local government.

Yaquina Head is a place where the public can participate in history and the wild nature of the Pacific Coast. Our priority work is maintaining access to the area's extraordinary visitor opportunities and to protect the unique scenic, scientific, educational, and recreational values in and around Yaquina Head.





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Yaquina Head

Outstanding National Area

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<https://www.flickr.com/photos/blmoregon/albums/72157625392020039/>

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