

Golf is Wrong Course for Coastal Boy Scout Camps

Phillip Johnson, Executive Director, Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition

Nearly five generations of Boy Scouts have gained important life lessons at camps Meriwether and Clark, nestled in a coastal forest south of Cape Lookout in Tillamook County. The Columbia Pacific Council of the Boy Scouts of America, based in Portland, acquired the 790-acre property in 1926.

Not only have scouts benefitted, the forest benefitted, too. Logged over when acquired by the Council, the forest has largely recovered, although some logging by the Council has occurred. While not yet an old-growth forest, it is a unique coastal habitat situated between the ocean beach and the sand dunes that extend south to the Sand Lake estuary. The forest continues north to dramatic Cape Lookout State Park.

Sadly, both the Scouting and environmental legacies of this land are in jeopardy. The Council proposes to lease 200 acres in the middle of the property to Mike Keiser, builder of the Bandon Dunes golf resort, to develop another of his signature “links-style” courses.

The Council says it needs funds to maintain the camps. However, there are substantial questions about the real needs of the Council at a time when Boy Scout councils around the country are cashing out their lands intended for scouting and conservation. Another Council property, Scouters Mountain in Happy Valley near Portland, is being sold to developers for an undisclosed amount. The Council has not been transparent about its financial problems or options to solve them.

The Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition has worked to protect the Oregon coast for 44 years. We believe this deal is wrong for Scouts and wrong for the Oregon coast. Oregon has plenty of existing golf courses and opportunities for more. But the stretch of coast encompassing camps Meriwether and Clark is unique and precious. While we appreciate that Mr. Keiser’s courses are different from usual country club greenswards, a golf course here would compromise the camp experience of future Scouts, degrade the public’s coastal legacy, and threaten a coastal ecosystem worth preserving.

The property would become essentially three parcels with camps on either side of an exclusive golf course. The forest would be nothing more than a backdrop for a man-made stage and the scouts’ wilderness experience reduced to a façade. The Council boasts that public lands almost entirely surround the property; Cape Lookout State Park, U.S. Forest Service lands, the new Sitka Sedge State Park, and the public beach along the ocean shore would provide stunning views to golfers willing to pay

top dollar for private access. But reverse the view, and observe that by treating neighboring public lands as an amenity, a golf development would degrade the value of these lands enjoyed by so many Oregonians.

The Columbia Pacific Council should set an example for its scouts through long-term, sustainable management of the property. We urge the Council to reject this deal and instead honor and protect the Scouting heritage of these camps and fulfill its environmental stewardship responsibility to future generations.

The Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition was founded in 1971 to preserve coastal landscapes and protect public access to Oregon's shore.