

## 2014 Hiker/Biker Survey Report

### Summary of Priority Improvements:

Details on how these recommendations were reached is below, followed by survey information

**Harris Beach:** install lockers, fix it station, cell phone charging station

**Thompsons Mills State Heritage Site:** Install hiker/biker site and access to potable water for entire park

**Bates State Park:** Install a group shelter with charging stations

**Ainsworth State Park:** Needs basic improvements including charging station and fix it station

**Umpqua State Park:** Install lockers and a fix it station

**L.L. Stub Stewart State Park:** Install a hiker/biker site

**Increase awareness of hiker/biker sites:** Work with CARD and other outlets to get media attention to sites. Highlight sites in park guide in future years, brainstorm on how to use social media to get out the word.

### Remove mention of pay phones in parks that no longer have a functioning pay phone

Find better ways to deal with the unsavory characters that are known to camp at hiker/biker sites by increased park ranger presence.

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### Priority Improvement Recommendations Details:

The recommendations were developed using responses from the hiker/biker surveys, discussions with other parks staff and direct contacts with touring cyclists. More information below.

### Fold in the small scale improvements during larger FIP projects

Make improvements to hiker/biker sites at parks that have large scale projects funded through FIP. For example: Nehalem Bay is undergoing a large project to upgrade electricity to the RV sites and replace old electrical boxes. The small project of running an electrical line to the hiker/biker site was added to this large project.

The park on the FIP project list that has some overlap to potential improvements to hiker/biker sites is:

- Harris Beach: Combine with FIP project to bike racks, fix it station and charging station.

### Make improvements based on feedback from touring cyclists and park manager feedback

- **Thompsons Mills State Heritage Site:** Install a hiker/biker site and drinking water. There are multiple possible improvements that can be made at the park, most of them do not involve hiker/biker, but all involve applying for a permit with the county. The county has communicated to the park to combine all the requests into one permit. The requests involving hiker/biker are: Install a hiker/biker at the park, install potable water for day use and for camping hiker/bikers. There is no potable water on site for visitors or staff. The park is on the Willamette Valley Scenic Bikeway, the most ridden Bikeway and also sees many day use riders.
- **Bates State Park:** Install a group shelter and charging stations. While no survey responses were collected from Bates there have been requests for a covered shelter. The Park Manager has also identified a shelter as a needed improvement. Bates is located on the Old West Bikeway and the

TransAmerica bicycle route. Bates State Park is the most used in the Mountain region, with 412 hiker/biker visitors in 2014, with cyclists far outnumbering car campers.

- **Ainsworth State Park:** Needs basic improvements including charging station and fix it station. The only hiker/biker site accessible from the Historic Columbia River Highway. Currently there is only a sign marking the site.
- **Umpqua State Park:** Install lockers and a fix it station. The Park Manager has been investigating how to do this.
- **L.L. Stub Stewart State Park:** Install a hiker/biker site. Currently, there are walk-in campsites, which do get full. Many cyclists from Portland ride this as a weekend trip expecting to find a walk in site, but they are often full. Many people, including staff, confuse the hiker/biker sites with walk in sites.

#### **Non infrastructure recommendations**

- Find better ways to deal with the unsavory characters that camp at hiker/biker sites by increased park ranger presence. Some are dropped off by homeless shelters that also pay the \$5, some do not pay. The concern/complaint about unsavory characters in the campsites was in many survey responses. One suggestion on how to cut down on this is to have rangers walk through the hiker/biker site more often and ask to see proof of payment.
- Increase awareness of hiker/biker sites through highlighting on OPRD website, media releases, social media, park guide and earned media. Explore other possible ways to increase awareness of sites.
- Remove mention of pay phones in parks that no longer have a functioning pay phone. Multiple complaints about pay phones that were out of order or not there when information on park claimed to have a working pay phone.

**Why Improve Hiker/biker Sites:** Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department has built a very positive reputation for its hiker/biker sites due to no reservation needed policy and locations on routes where cyclists use. With very little investment OPRD can build on that good reputation.

There have been almost no improvements since the creation of many of the hiker/biker sites. Improvements are low cost and often easily accomplished. Hiker/bikers pay per person, making the site revenue on par with other sites when considered on a per person basis, yet hiker/biker sites are often much less expensive and use far less land than other camping options.

**History of Surveys:** Surveys of campers in hiker/biker sites were conducted in 2010, 2012 and in 2014. Each year we were able to increase the number of completed surveys from more parks through the help of park managers.

Each year's worth of survey data has proved very useful to point the way for OPRD to create a more comfortable and safe stay. With the increasing popularity of bicycle tourism other states are requesting the survey results and information on improvements so they can try to catch up to Oregon's reputation as the best place for bicycle tourism. Montana State Parks, Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism,

the Minnesota Department of Transportation and even County Clare in Ireland have asked for information on OPRD hiker/biker sites.

**Survey Results through the Years:** This 2014 survey had 346 responses, 20 of them from hikers. The 2012 survey had 194 responses, 12 of them from hikers, showing about 5 to 6 percent of users are hikers with cyclists as the majority. The demographics of the respondents have not varied significantly from year to year. This survey shows 52% are traveling with family and/or friends and 42% are traveling solo. The age range is 10- 70 years old.

Each year a large number of respondents requested a convenient place to recharge cell phones and other devices. The 2014 survey asked specifically about a place to charge devices and 83% of respondents rank charging stations as “important”.

Food and gear storage lockers are needed, especially on the coast due to raccoons taking food. Lockers also serve as a safe place to store gear so hiker/bikers could explore the park and shop in town, thus increasing the tourism revenue in small towns adjacent to state parks.

All three years’ worth of survey responses reported a lack of awareness of hiker/biker sites before the trip and a need to know where to find them and how to find detailed information on them.

**New Information:** The 2014 survey questions were designed to get specific information on the importance of possible improvements. The survey listed six possible amenities that are often discussed as possible additions/improvements. Respondents ranked them.

**Rated as Important:**

- Electrical plug-ins 83%
- Storage lockers 64%
- Bike Fix it station 51%\*
- Fire Pit 44%
- Group Shelter 31%
- Increased Park rules enforcement 18%

\* 51% reporting Fix-it stations as important, many write-in comments requested the use of a floor pump, which is often at a fix it station.

**Satisfaction**

Respondents ranked satisfaction with a list of existing facilities and services.

**The top three for satisfaction:**

- Site Cleanliness: 95%
- Interactions with Park staff and volunteers: 92% (8% neutral, 0% unsatisfied)
- Drinking water proximity: 90%

**The top three for unsatisfied:**

- Amount of space at site: 13%

- Restroom proximity: 12%
- Shower proximity: 10%

### **What Respondents Wish they Knew**

The question “what do you wish you knew before your trip” had a significant number of responses indicating that many people did not know about the hiker/biker sites before their trip and wished they had known. There was also significant number of responses indicating that it was difficult to find a list of where all the hiker/biker sites were located.

The question on how to improve hiker/biker sites did have many suggestions, and just about as many compliments. The majority of the responses suggested larger hiker/biker sites and closer restrooms. The request for more hours to buy fire wood and more fire pits was also mentioned.

### **Safety**

74% of respondents reported not being concerned for their personal items. Of those that reported being concerned, 23% respondents reported it was due to wildlife and 31% reported it was due to other people.

The issue of objectionable characters using alcohol and making noise staying at hiker/biker sites was mentioned a number of times under several of the fill-in questions. Respondents were uncomfortable with their presence. Some respondents requested more ranger presence in the hiker/biker sites to help alleviate this.

**Future Surveys:** Surveys can be time consuming for the park staff. Data entry and analysis also take time and need to be factored in when considering conducting a new survey. With all the improvements to some of the parks and consistency in the data collected from year to year it would now be most efficient to just conduct surveys at the parks with major hiker/biker improvements to gauge the responses to the improvements since many of them are experimental. For instance, we do not know how popular the covered shelters will be or if they pose problems we have not considered. Surveys at the sites with improvements will help answer these questions to allow us to be strategic about other improvements.

**Actual Use Numbers:** Actual hiker/biker use numbers are available due to tracking the fee payment. Tom Hughes supplied the data. Because the payment is \$5 per person the numbers are of individuals that camped at a hiker/biker sites.

2010: 10,618

2012: 10,221

2012: 11,186

2013: 11,840

2014: 13,631

The most used hiker/biker site is Harris Beach State Park.