



ORCA: Oregon Coast Alliance

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Protecting the Oregon Coast

Dunes City City Council
P.O. Box 97
Westlake, OR 97493

Nov. 9, 2011

Re: Proposed Dunes City Ordinances 210a and 211a

Sent via electronic mail

Dear Members of City Council,

Oregon Coast Alliance submits this additional testimony to you for consideration at the hearing of Ordinance proposals 210a and 211a. As part of this testimony, we resubmit the letter we sent to the Planning Commission on the same proposals, dated Oct. 26, 2011, along with the attachment of the map and statistics of Garrison Lake.

In this additional letter, ORCA would like to urge City Councilors to consider the Dunes City septic maintenance debate as a problem in how best to protect a common resource for the benefit of all residents. The waters of Woahink and Siltcoos Lakes (and the associated streams and groundwaters) are a resource held in common. That is to say: the waters are used by many people for drinking water and other amenities, but are not owned by them. This can lead to a situation in which all wish to benefit from the resource, but none wish to pay the costs of protection. If this is not legislated, the inevitable result is that the resource – drinking water, in this case – becomes degraded. That would mean more sophisticated and costly water filtration systems for Dunes City residents, Honeyman State Park, and any businesses that also use the same water supply.

Dunes City residents have the opportunity, through Ordinance 203, to maintain an across-the-board fair law that requires every resident to bear approximately the same cost of protecting the resource for the benefit of all. It is natural and expected that one whose septic system is failing be required to pay for its upgrade or repair, for his own benefit and that of all other residents who share the waters. In this case, the “commonality” of the resource is even greater than residents alone, as visitors to Honeyman State Park, which receives more than one million visitors per year, also drink the water of Woahink Lake.

Any degradation of Woahink Lake's water may eventually also increase filtration or treatment costs to the Park, and thus to Oregon taxpayers.

The most current figures compiled under Ordinance 203 indicate the success of Dunes City's septic maintenance program. The law requires an initial mandatory pumping and inspection of all septic systems, and also requires Dunes City to keep records of the septic program. The record-keeping has not been fully implemented, but current data shows that as of summer 2011 there are about 781 septic systems in Dunes City, of which about 69% have complied with the law. There has been some confusion; some of those who have obeyed the law have had their septic systems pumped but not evaluated; others the reverse. But 69% is a fairly good showing of compliance, and indicates that people in Dunes City do care about the water quality of the lakes on which they depend for drinking water, recreation, fishing and other amenities. It is especially noteworthy that of the 534 households that have complied thus far, 65 had failed septic systems, or needed replacements or repairs. That certainly indicates Ordinance 203's success in protecting Dunes City's drinking water supply.

Other communities on the coast face similar struggles to protect water quality in coastal lakes important to area residents. Port Orford, for example, has been concerned about Garrison Lake, which is on its border. The South Coast Watershed Council and its partners compiled some data, and a map, of Garrison Lake's shoreline outside the City as of September 2011. ORCA submitted this information in prior testimony to the Planning Commission. Of 262 parcels having buildings on Garrison Lake's shoreline, only about 32% have septic systems inspected in 1985 or more recently. All the others were probably built and/or inspected more than twenty-five years ago.

Dunes City, with its existing septic ordinance and data showing nearly 70% compliance, is an example of what can be done by a community focused on protecting its critical water resources for the good of all. Oregon Coast Alliance hopes the City will continue this proud achievement — and perhaps build on it by adding an educational component to Ordinance 203 in order to expand understanding and willingness of residents to work together for the common good.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

/s/ Cameron La Follette

Cameron La Follette
Land Use Director