Dear Cannon Beach mayor and councilors,

In my mind, there are two separate issues at stake regarding dune grading: (1) dune grading for views and (2) dune grading to return the dunes to a more natural, native species-rich dune ecology. I am opposed to the former, absolutely. What I am not so certain about is whether it would be wise to grade the dunes down, reshape them and replant (after removing the non-native and invasive European beach grass) with the native plants that originally grew here or might be successful growing here, whether they were here originally or not. My greatest fear over dune grading is that it would be done over and over again at great expense, with no end in sight. What would happen to the newly planted and established native plants if repeated dune grading were allowed?

I consider myself an environmentalist. I have watched with sadness as the Chapman Point ecology and native plant community diminished to nearly nothing over the years since the 1950s due to the planting and take-over of the European dune grass. I would like nothing better than to reseed the dunes with the native plants that used to live there. I first knew these dunes before there was any European dune grass. I also know that John Yeon thought he was doing the right thing by planting it to stop the blowing sand from inundating the homes at the top of the dune and sandblasting the windows of those homes. The native plants extant then were not preventing the blowing sand from doing so, hence his decision to use the solution of the day which was to plant European dune grass. I very much like Kathleen Sayce’s suggestions of what native plants could/should be used to revegetate the dunes. We now know they would have to be used in conjunction with American dune grass (Armeria brevigulata) in order to stabilize and widen the dunes without growing them taller while still trapping blowing sand.

On the other hand, I see the wisdom in Cameron LaFollette’s view that in a built up area it is wiser to keep the dunes as they are to act as protection from rising seas, higher King Tides, stronger storms and the unknown effects of climate change, including the possibility of a change from sand accretion to a sand deficit “which could see increased erosion of our beaches and dunes in the near future” at stated in the DOGAMI report. This points to the question of safety of the oceanfront homeowners. Lower dunes could allow waves to overtop them, affecting not only the oceanfront homes, but those behind the dunes as well. Science says lowering the dunes to a certain height would maintain safety. My feeling is there are no guarantees, and higher means safer.

Access to the beach is another issue. We have heard testimony on both sides; one position is that the elderly or disabled can no longer get down to the beach.
because of the steepness of the dunes at Breakers Point and Ocean Street, and the other being just the opposite, that elderly persons have no problem with accessing the beach. My partner, Darrell Clukey, has limited movement due to arthritis of the knees, yet has had no issues going either up or down the dunes at Breakers Point. If access truly is an issue for some, Les Shirley Park is always a viable option.

Where does all this leave me regarding my final position on this issue? Rather than going with my heart, which says to return the dunes to a more natural state using native plants, I find myself coming down on the side of leaving the dunes alone. I have no problem with saying no to dune grading for views. I do have a problem with grading the dunes lower, even if they are restored to a more natural ecology if that would potentially put people in danger from overtopping waves or erosion caused by the unknowns of climate change. As we just witnessed the horrific effects of Hurricane Dorian and the cataclysmic flooding in Texas, we know that stronger storms and the rising of the ocean waters will be coming here, too. Do we risk peoples’ lives for the opportunity to bring back native species? It’s not an easy or simple decision to make. I wish you all wisdom in making your decision.

P.S. Please know that my partner Darrell Clukey agrees with me that no dune grading for views should be allowed, nor for any other reason.

Sincerely,

Susan Glarum
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