



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The West Cliff bike and pedestrian path is envisioned as part of the eventual Monterey Bay sanctuary trail.

Trail from Wilder to La Selva Beach would aim to highlight sanctuary

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SANTA CRUZ — Some day you'll be able to walk or bike along a 15-mile coastal stretch from Wilder Ranch to La Selva Beach, and study the county's special relationship with the ocean along the way.

Spaced along the new Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Scenic Trail will be signs or kiosks emphasizing the interdependence of land and sea.

Some will tell how steelhead trout use Santa Cruz County streams to spawn; others will show where time and tides have shaped the coastline.

Segments of the trail — without the proposed exhibits — are already open to the public.

They include pathways at Wilder Ranch State Park, West Cliff Drive and down to Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk and municipal wharf, as well as bike trails on either side of the yacht harbor. The trail continues along East Cliff Drive's pedestrian pathway to Capitola, and the long strand of beach that starts at New Brighton State Beach and continues uninterrupted all the way to Moss Landing.

The segments will eventually be linked and marked with signs bearing the whale tail logo used by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for the marine sanctuary.

The trail will serve as a gateway to the sanctuary for visitors, said John Akeman, a planner for Santa Cruz County. Visitors can learn as much about the sanctuary striding along the bluffs and sands of Santa Cruz County as visiting the Monterey Bay Aquarium, he said.

Signs and kiosks would illustrate relationship between land and sea

Because many parts of the scenic trail are not directly alongside the water, they are still in the planning stages, Akeman said. There will also have to be interaction with residents in the yet-to-be-connected segments to ensure tourist traffic is routed to everyone's satisfaction.

On Thursday, Akeman directed a daylong tour of much of the trail with local, state and federal professional "interpreters" to brainstorm ways to make it more educational and relevant to the marine sanctuary.

Unlike Yosemite National Park, visitors entering Monterey Bay Marine National Sanctuary don't see a sign or stop at an entrance station. Likewise, there is little in the way of signs or kiosks around the bay to help walking, bicycling or motoring visitors learn about the sanctuary.

"We see this as a chance to get a reality check as to what's possible and realistic," said Linda Stonier, a interpretive program coordinator with the National Park Service in San Francisco who is lending her expertise to the project.

Looking over a giant map of the greater Santa Cruz area, it was agreed that there are already many trails of various kinds. But the trails do not necessarily connect the land to the sea in people's minds, said Bob Culbertson, chief ranger for Santa Cruz area state parks.

"They're just not tied to the sanctuary,"

Culbertson said.

Among the places where the connections of the marine world to terrestrial world are most evident is at Wilder Ranch State Park.

"It's easy to see if you stand out on the bluff and look up into the mountains," Stonier said. "You make an intellectual connection."

To help stimulate that connection all the way to La Selva Beach, signs, kiosks and video displays can be developed to provide people with the information they need. Already some \$50,000 in state and federal funds is allocated to that end, said Akeman.

Among the land-sea connections discussed are how the cool waters create the local climate, the natural history of steelhead that historically swim up Santa Cruz county streams to spawn, and the terraced landscape of the north coast that has been carved by the sea and the uplifting earth.

"(Steelhead) is a critical topic that ties right into the bay," said John Del'Osso, chief of interpretation at Pt. Reyes National Seashore, who also attended Thursday's session.

Even human history will be tied in.

At Wilder Ranch the cycling of water raining down the mountains, and streaming back to the bay is illustrated by the old stream-powered Pelton water wheel that provided electric power for the Wilder Ranch dairy — the first electrical power in the county, ranch officials say.

The ideas gathered at Thursday's tour will be used to come up with specific proposals for enhancing the trail.

"This is a good start," Akeman said. "We're on our way."