



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

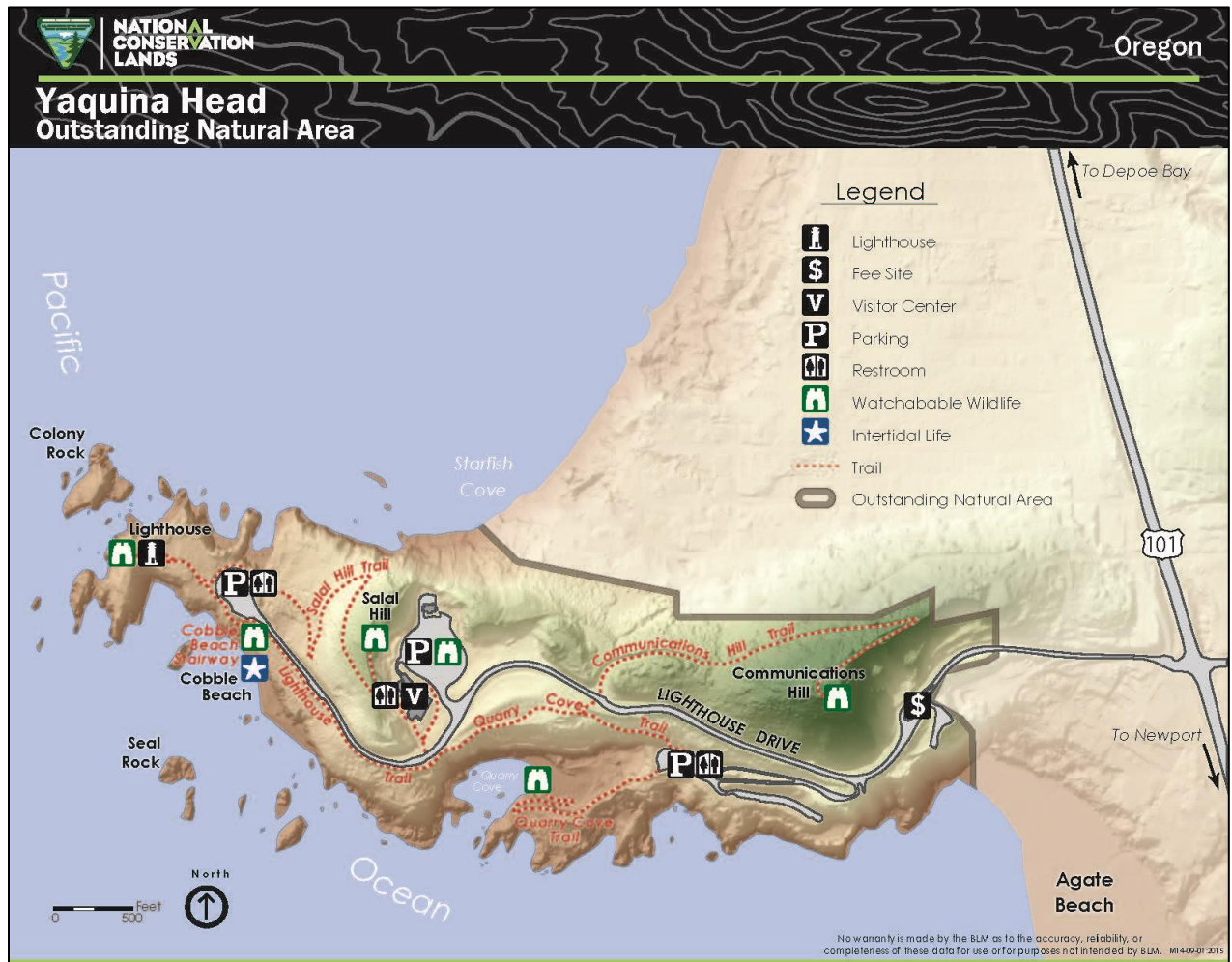
**Oregon/Washington**  
2023: Annual Manager's Report

# Yaquina Head

Outstanding Natural Area



# Map



# Accomplishments

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On August 19th, 2023, Yaquina Head Lighthouse celebrated its sesquicentennial anniversary as an active aid to navigation on the Oregon Coast. This celebration was a 3-day event surrounding the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the initial lighting of the lighthouse. It included a US Coast Guard Honor Guard with a special 'ringing of the bell' for past lighthouse keepers, speeches by local dignitaries, and a variety of public events honoring the role of the lighthouse in the past, current, and future of the local community. In addition to the Coast Guard, representatives from local and state government, the Department of Interior Museum, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Oregon/Washington State Director participated in the ceremony.

During fiscal year (FY) 2023, Yaquina Head experienced a large turnover in leadership and in the education program. Delays in filling vacancies due to limited applicants and a very high cost of living resulted in a sparse crew early in the season. Due to vacancies in permanent staff and the inability to onboard seasonal staff prior to the spring education season, many ranger-led programs—both virtual and in-person—were limited during FY 2023. Staff did successfully provide orientation, lesson plans, and instructional materials to 100 teachers, who led their own standards-based programs at Yaquina Head for 3,383 students. Once additional seasonal summer staff were on-boarded, lighthouse tours were added with increasing frequency and became very popular with visitors to the site.



**From bottom left: United States Coast Guard during the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration; visitors investigating a Coast Guard patrol boat; bell ringing ceremony for past lightkeepers with honor guard**

# Challenges

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As a small and heavily visited recreation destination, Yaquina Head experiences episodes of traffic congestion at the entrance station, popular overlooks, and parking areas. During the summer of 2022, Yaquina Head, in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration Western Federal Lands Highway Division (FHWA-WFL), completed a study to evaluate the site’s transportation system. The Yaquina Head Traffic Study—which is a collaboration between the FHWA-WFL, the BLM, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and the City of Newport—identified issues and potential solutions to address site needs, including operations at the entrance station, overall site circulation, multimodal accommodations with safety enhancements, parking management, electric vehicle charging, and congestion mitigation. When identifying potential improvements, the study considered public and stakeholder input, environmental constraints, constructability challenges, and financial feasibility. In October of 2022, the City of Newport formally adopted the traffic study and plan. The BLM also successfully supported the City of Newport in securing a six-million-dollar Federal Land Access Program grant in 2022. During FY 2023, the City of Newport issued a contract for re-design of the access to Yaquina Head from Highway 1.

Another reoccurring challenge is maintaining staffing levels to support the education program and visitor services, including facility maintenance. Housing costs on the Oregon coast are very high, with many prior housing options having been converted into short-term rentals. This poses challenges for new seasonal staff and results in a high turnover rate for seasonal positions.



**A line of vehicles waiting at the Yaquina Head entrance station**

# Visitors

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From exploring tidepools teeming with life to seeing Oregon's tallest lighthouse, there is something for every visitor at Yaquina Head. The BLM counted 444,877 visitors to Yaquina Head in FY 2023. Although slightly lower, this is similar to FY 2022 visitation (453,293) levels. The reduction in recorded visitation is largely due to reduced staffing capability, which resulted in earlier closing times for part of the year.

Yaquina Head provides a variety of scenic coastal and wildlife viewpoints from which visitors may see whales, seals, and seabirds. A carryover from pandemic mitigation efforts, Yaquina Head staff provided the public with self-guided information on ecology, natural systems, and cultural history. The self-guided information targets various age groups, needs, and interests. In FY 2023, Yaquina Head continued work with Agents of Discovery, an educational mobile game application that lets BLM-administered sites create interactive, location-based challenges to engage visitors. Through Agents of Discovery, Yaquina Head offers visitors multiple interactive, self-guided virtual tours through their cellphones. Yaquina Head also worked closely with public affairs staff on frequent social media postings about area resources and upcoming events.

In 2023, Yaquina Head interpretive staff presented approximately 900 lighthouse tours for 7,500 visitors and provided “tidepool tips” on resource protection, visitor safety and interpretation to approximately 72,000 visitors at Cobble Beach.



**A seasonal ranger ready to offer a lighthouse tour**

# Partnerships

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Many of Yaquina Head's accomplishments are the result of partnerships, which include, but are not limited to:

- Oregon State University leads tidepool species monitoring, seabird monitoring, and climate change research at Yaquina Head.
- The Friends of Yaquina Lighthouses has a memorandum of understanding with the BLM allowing it to operate the bookstore in the interpretive center. In 2023, Friends of Yaquina Lighthouses also provided four high school age rangers to assist visitors at the tidepools.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has jurisdiction over the islands and rocks off the headland, which are both part of the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge and designated wilderness. A 2020 memorandum of understanding with the USFWS strengthens the partnership within Interior Region 9 between Yaquina Head and the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex. This partnership improves service to the public and focuses on shared stewardship goals, educating visitors about coastal resources, and addressing increasing recreation demands in the region.
- The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife administers the Yaquina Head Marine Garden, which includes Cobble Beach and the Quarry Cove Intertidal Area. The BLM monitors and helps manage use of these areas through a memorandum of understanding.



An early blue violet (*Viola adunca*) at Yaquina Head

# Science

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Yaquina Head is a hub for scientific research on the Oregon coast. Each year, the BLM issues science permits to universities and agencies for research on wildlife biology, as well as oceanic and atmospheric data collection. In 2023, the BLM issued two such permits. The BLM also continued with the previously awarded Management Studies Support Program grant to Oregon State University. This grant continues funding for a long-term seabird monitoring project, which includes a community science initiative that enriches the visitor experience.

Seabirds are a cornerstone asset for Yaquina Head and are a primary feature of educational and recreational opportunities at this site. Yaquina Head and adjacent rocks provide habitat for one of the largest seabird colonies on the western coast of the contiguous United States. The region's coastal waters support extensive commercial and recreational fisheries and ecotourism, including birdwatching. During the summer months, over 80,000 seabirds nest on or adjacent to Yaquina Head and use the coastal waters for foraging. Scientists have documented the importance of seabirds, including common murre, as indicators of ecosystem health, changing ocean conditions, and climate oscillations. Oregon State University's research contributes to the BLM's ability to effectively manage and conserve seabirds so that future generations may enjoy this spectacular viewing experience.



**An aerial photograph of thousands of common murre nesting on Colony Rock**

# Climate Impacts

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Climate change amplifies threats to the natural landscape. Rising temperatures and prolonged droughts in the Pacific Northwest are impacting the natural landscape, including through more intense storms and extreme weather.

Yaquina Head partners with Oregon State University and the USFWS on the collection of data used to assess ecosystem response to variation in ocean climate and sea levels along the Oregon coast and Northern California Current System. This collaborative effort allows for a better understanding of how climate change impacts the natural landscape and helps inform conservation efforts.



**Volunteer Irene Shepard teaches children about tides and effects of climate change**



# Climate Resiliency

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The history of past land use plays an important role in future management at Yaquina Head. A large portion of the site was in the private domain until acquired by the BLM in the 1980s. While in private ownership, the headland was grazed and seeded with livestock forage. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, rock quarrying resulted in the removal of a large portion of one of the two notable hills originally comprising Yaquina Head. Since designation as an Outstanding Natural Area in 1980, the site has recovered much of its natural and wild character primarily through passive restoration efforts.

In FY 2023, crews and volunteers continued to restore and maintain open meadows and revegetate areas with native grasses and forbs to support pollinator species. Much of the physical labor was provided by volunteers from Friends of Yaquina Lighthouses and other partners. This effort was part of the 4,082 hours of work conducted by volunteers at Yaquina Head in FY 2023. This year, over 6,500 native pollinator plants were added to the landscape to promote Oregon silverspot butterfly habitat.



**Volunteers work with US Fish & Wildlife Service and BLM staff to plant pollinator species and restore native plant populations**

# Social and Environmental Justice

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Yaquina Head continues to offer the public accessible and inclusive interpretative programs and projects. During FY 2023, the interpretive staff helped with the development of non-English language handout materials. Staff also pursued and received funding for two long 'MobiMats' that will provide improved access to Quarry Cove Beach for those visitors that have mobility constraints. The Oregon coast is very rugged, and Quarry Cove is one of best locations in the region for visitors requiring this type of access to physically touch the Pacific Ocean.

In 2023, the Yaquina Head continued its partnership with Environment for the Americas, a non-profit organization that places diverse students in conservation internships with federal agencies. Ricardo Rodriguez, the 2023 Environment for the Americas intern, was a valuable member of Yaquina Head's education and interpretation team. In the spring, he co-led in-person environmental education programs. For World Migratory Bird Day, Ricardo developed and led an interpretive guided hike on light pollution and how it affects migratory birds.




**Ricardo Rodriguez, Environment for the Americas Intern, provides orientation to students as part of a guided hike about birds**

# Events


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The BLM Artist-in-Residence Program offers opportunities for painters, photographers, potters, sculptors, and other artists to promote deeper understanding of, and dialogue about, the significance of natural, cultural, and historic resources on public lands managed by the BLM, including those in the National Landscape Conservation System. In FY 2023, Yaquina Head, along with partners Friends of Yaquina Head Lighthouses and Oregon Coast Council for the Arts, welcomed photographer Darryl Baird. Darryl spent from mid-May through early June creating and sharing his art at Yaquina Head. In November, Darryl had an opening of his artwork and exhibit at the Newport Performing Arts Center, Olive Street Gallery. He also donated one of his works to the Department of Interior Museum during the Yaquina Head 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ceremony. The Artist-in-Residence Program will return to Yaquina Head in FY 2024.

2023 YHONA ARTIST IN RESIDENCE  
DARRYL BAIRD



NOVEMBER 1, 2023 -  
JANUARY 21, 2024  
OLIVE STREET GALLERY



Olive Street  
GALLERY

# Final Thoughts

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This year continued to confirm the value of recreation and the innate need of the public to access areas of naturalness. While in-person programming is back, Yaquina Head is also continuing to provide the innovative virtual programming it began during the pandemic. These programs allow the BLM to share this special place with a wider and more diverse audience.

Yaquina Head is a place where the public can participate in history and the wild nature of the Pacific Coast. Our priority work is maintaining access to the area's extraordinary visitor opportunities and protecting the unique scenic, scientific, educational, and recreational values in and around Yaquina Head.

For over 150 years, the Yaquina Head Lightstation has offered guidance and direction to people navigating the harsh Oregon Coast. In 2023, we took the opportunity offered by the sesquicentennial to reflect on the service and contribution that this lighthouse, and the people that crewed it, provided to the local community. We continue to work on restoring plant species native to the headland and on infrastructure needs identified in Great American Outdoor Act projects. Finally, this challenging year showed the resiliency of Yaquina Head staff and their dedication to conserving the site's resources while providing a world class educational experience to visitors.



Yaquina Head Lighthouse from Cobble Beach



## NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

### **Yaquina Head**

#### **Outstanding National Area**

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<https://www.flickr.com/photos/blmoregon/albums/72157625392020039/>

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