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By Terry Dillman Of the News-Times

The Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association is back. Online, that is.

Director Onno Husing said they took the opportunity to build a better website after a virus decimated the old one, depriving the organization an online presence for several months. Working with Gray's web Design in Yachats, Husing said they developed a more user-friendly site complete with several information-packed reports contained within the OCZMA newsletter.

OCZMA defines itself as "a clearinghouse of objective information on issues relating to the Oregon Coast" - information the association shares with the state and federal governments, and the public.

Husing pointed to two "really important pieces of content" on the new site. One is the June newsletter, which focuses on wave energy development along the Oregon coast. The other - finished in March - is "A History of Highway 101," which outlines what Husing calls "the inspiring story" of how the highway was built. Knowing its history, he stated, is a prerequisite to considering how to deal with the highway's role in the Oregon coast's future transportation needs, and how to keep the road functional with the growing demands on the system.

This report, he added, is the foundation for "a conversation about the Oregon coast's transportation infrastructure" and the base for follow-up reports about present and future challenges of maintaining Highway 101.

In March 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued his famous message to Congress, calling for the establishment of an ambitious public works programs to rescue the economy from the grip of the infamous depression that followed the stock market crash of 1929.

"Unemployment rates reached unimaginable levels. Banks were failing. Farm foreclosures mounted," Husing noted. Would Roosevelt's - and other - measures revive the sinking economy? "At the time, no one knew," Husing added. Oregon was fortunate to have an engineering ace on hand - that greatly enhanced the state's chances of recovery.

His name was Conde B. McCullough, bridge engineer with the Oregon State Highway Department (OSHD), whose national reputation as a leading civil engineer and close personal ties to the to the director of the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads brought millions of federal dollars to the state.

"These resources put hundreds of Oregonians back to work and gave OSHD the resources to complete U.S. Highway 101 by 1936," Husing stated.

But the story of the highway - and two men who prominently figured in its construction - begins years before.

In 1916, McCullough accepted an offer to become an assistant professor of civil engineering at the Oregon Agricultural College, now Oregon State University. Just three years later, the Oregon State Highway Commission asked him to become state bridge engineer, which Husing noted McCulloch took "because resources were flowing into Oregon's highway construction program." In 1919, Oregon also became the first state to establish a fuel tax of one cent per gallon, and under the Federal Aid Road Act, Congress began providing matching funds to states to strengthen state highway programs.

"Understandably, the first major highways constructed in Oregon were not built on the Oregon coast," Husing noted in his 27-page report. "The priority was completing the 'Pacific Highway' to connect Oregon with Washington and California, and the Columbia River highway. Before the automobile, Oregonians traveled to the coast largely by wagon or train. When automobile ownership became more affordable, coastal residents and other Oregonians clamored for highway access to the Oregon coast."

Ben Jones, who served as a mail carrier on the primitive roads of the central Oregon coast, led the lobbying efforts for the highway. Those efforts also led to the establishment of Lincoln County, which at one time was part of a much larger Benton County. In 1892, Jones led a delegation of coastal folks to the Benton County Courthouse in Corvallis "to petition for road improvements." Benton County's commissioners not only denied the request, but joked about the coast "clam diggers" who "didn't need roads."

"With the help of the clam diggers, we are going to create a new county," was the famous Jones reply.

The Benton County snub gave birth to Lincoln County in 1893, with the driving force behind it being a need to improve

transportation on the coast. In 1919 - the same year McCulloch joined the highway department as state bridge engineer - Jones, serving as a state legislator, wrote the first bill authorizing the construction of the "Oregon Coast Highway." The legislation placed a measure before Oregon voters to authorize construction of a road from Astoria to the California border. It passed by a 2-1 margin, and in 1921, work began on a new, 350-mile north-south road on the Oregon coast dubbed "The Roosevelt Coast Military Highway."

At the time, few roads ran north to south on the coast.

"For the most part, early roads were rough graded or wood planked, or made of crushed rock," Husing noted. "In some places, shell material from Native American middens were used to surface the roads. Often though, the sandy beach was the only north-to-south route."

Daunting topography, the need to purchase rights-of-way, stands of formidable Sitka spruce trees, monumental grading projects, and countless streams and rivers that required crossings made the construction effort exceedingly complex.

The two tunnels at Arch Cape and Heceta Head provide unique challenges due to the brittle basalt formations the workers had to break through. Even today, Husing pointed out, delays occur in such settings.

Bridges were another matter. McCulloch is the one who designed the spans over the streams and rivers, following an OSHD method of crossing the smaller streams first to stitch together the paved roads.

The first "significant bridge" went up in 1921 in Clatsop County. The Depoe Bay Bridge and Rocky Creek Bridge (renamed the Ben Jones Memorial Bridge in 1925 after Jones died of a heart attack) in Lincoln County were among the next "batch of bridges" to go up. They were finished in 1927.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, President Herbert Hoover authorized a "modest federal public works program" to counter the effects of the depression that followed. Husing said the federal program gave state officials "a great opportunity to accelerate construction" of Highway 101. More bridges went up, but ferry services were still needed in many places to cross waterways.

"Despite all these improvements - stretches of new paved roads and bridges, improved ferry service - automobile travel on the Oregon coast continued to be a time-consuming, unpredictable affair," noted Husing. "Everyone understood that U.S. Highway 101 would never be a 'real' highway until the six major rivers and estuaries on the Oregon coast were spanned with bridges."

When FDR took office, Husing said "the stars lined up to make the Oregon coast a showcase for economic recovery."

By the end of 1935, five bridges - "each one a masterpiece," Husing noted - spanned the remaining major coastal rivers. Among them were Alsea Bay Bridge in Waldport, and Yaquina Bay Bridge in Newport.

"The projects were intended to be labor-intensive," Husing noted. "Hundreds of people were put to work. The purchase of construction materials injected needed resources into the local economy." Timber companies naturally lobbied for the use of wood to build the coastal bridges. They were ultimately made of steel and concrete, but local lumber went into building the scaffolding and concrete forms for those bridges.

Yaquina Bay Bridge - the last of the six great coastal spans - opened to traffic in September 1936. The cover of the program for the October dedication called it "The Completion of the Last Link of the Oregon Coast Highway." It took 15 years and an estimated \$25 million to build Highway 101.

Today, it remains an integral part of the Oregon coast landscape.

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