

Breaking trail by Jefferson Robbins

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Hikers gather near an overlook of Rocky Reach Dam and the Columbia River along the first phase of the Rocky Reach Trail extension. Once the planned trail is completed, it will hook Lincoln Rock State Park with the 11-mile Apple Capital REcreation Loop Trail. The guided walk was held Saturday morning to give people a glimpse of the trail route.



As Bob Parlette, right, addresses the crowd, orchard spraying can be seen in the background. Recent spray work made it unsafe to hike the Phase 3 portion of the planned Rocky Reach Trail extension on Saturday morning. Once the trail is built, a barrier between the trail and orchard land should keep spray problems at bay.

Photo provided/033013 World photo/Mike Bonnicksen

BAKER FLATS — Beulah Friedrich would've liked to go the whole five miles, just like she did 23 years ago.

Friedrich, of Wenatchee, was among the first supporters to walk the planned route of the Apple Capital Recreation Loop Trail's northward Rocky Reach Trail extension, back in 1990, in an awareness-raising walk led by Bob Parlette and Gordon Congdon. She returned Saturday for the first such walk to be held since the Washington Supreme Court cleared the way for trailwork to begin this spring.

But there was a wrinkle: Seasonal spraying in orchards along the unblazed route took place Thursday, and orchardists told the Washington State Parks Department it would be four days before the sprayed zones were safe to reenter unprotected.

That meant hikers on the long-planned inaugural walk could travel only on the one-mile northern phase, or the slightly shorter southern phase. The three miles in the middle were off limits.

"We're not happy," Friedrich said, returning to the start point at Lincoln Rock State Park after a less-than-challenging one-mile trek. "We wanted to hike back to our car at the Apple Commission."

The obstacle seemed a petty echo of the long-running legal feud that held up development of the trail for seven years. Orchardists who leased land along the five-mile Department of Transportation right of way sued in 2004, saying the project violated the Growth Management Act. In 2011, the state Supreme Court ruled against them, 9-0.

Parlette was back in the lead for this walk, pointing out sights along the way and stumping for donations to the trail project, expected to cost just over \$5 million. That's some distance from the \$1.5 million estimate laid out in 1988.

"There's a couple of bridges people didn't account for early on," Parlette said, "and the hearing examiner added a couple of requirements to satisfy the complaining orchardists, like a fence and a big 100-foot buffer."

The northern phase is fully funded through contributions from State Parks, the DOT, the Chelan County PUD and private donations, with construction set to begin there in May. The southern phase could start work this fall or in 2014 if the Complete The Loop Coalition, which Parlette chairs, can raise at least \$300,000 in its current fund drive. That phase would include a small interpretive stop.

Once complete, the extension would grant access from Lincoln Rock to the 11-mile Loop Trail that runs along the Wenatchee and East Wenatchee riverfronts. Walkers, cyclists and other trail users would have the option of adding 10 miles out to the state park and back.

Parlette led walkers to the largest ravine that would have to be crossed by a trail bridge, within sight of Rocky Reach Dam's fish access spillpipe. At their backs was a flat parcel that was previously orchard land, the applewood now chopped into cords, bundled, and stacked.

There Columbia River scholar William Layman treated the 46 assembled hikers to a poetic geological and cultural history of the river system.

"We are the carriers of the Columbia River," Layman said. "They say that our whole selves change every seven years, so we might thin about how many generations we've carried the river."

Once the north and south spurs of the trail are done, they must be joined by the \$3.5 million three-mile stretch in the middle. Parlette hopes to collect \$1 million for that phase from private sources in an ongoing Complete The Loop fundraising drive.

"I've been fighting for this for 20 years, and it's gonna be a happy day for me when I see construction start," he said.

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