



MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION

Abiqua Falls Discussion
Minutes

Tuesday, September 8, 2026, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Commissioners' Boardroom
Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Suite 5231
Salem, Oregon 97301

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioners: Danielle Bethell, Kevin Cameron and Colm Willis.

Board Office: Alvin Klausen, Matt Lawyer Jonathan Sanford, Toni Whitler, and Trevor Lane.

Public Works: Brian May, Kevin Thompson, and Brian Nicholas.

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD): Lisa Sumption, Matt Rippley, Guy Rodriguez.

Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF): Kyle Kaupp, Ben Burns, Mike Wilson

Sheriff's Office: Nick Hunter.

Guest: Kathy Rogers.

Commissioner Kevin Cameron called the meeting to order at 11:05 a.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

-Commissioner Kevin Cameron

2. Potential Partnership in Managing Abiqua Falls

-All

- OPRD:
 - Status of Acquisition:
 - Two properties involved:
 - Abbey Foundation property:
 - 40 acres – Abiqua Falls.
 - Appraised at \$600,000.
 - Weyerhaeuser property:
 - 160 acres.
 - Appraised at \$1.38M.
 - Verbally negotiated to \$1.4M to include mineral rights.
 - Get approval from Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission in September:
 - Aim to close by December 31, 2026.
 - Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF):
 - Up to \$600,000 LWCF available for Abiqua Falls 40-acre parcel:
 - Trail and on-site improvements only.
 - Acceptance of LWCF:
 - Encumbers 40 acres in perpetuity for recreation use.
 - One-time funding and cannot be used for general maintenance.
 - Concept of Partnership / Lease:

- OPRD would own fee title for required bond years and is open to:
 - Lease or intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with Marion County for day-to-day management.
 - At end of bond period, OPRD could transfer ownership to County at zero cost if mutually agreed.
 - OPRD emphasizes:
 - It does not receive general fund for operations.
 - Relies on fees and lottery funds, which are down.
 - It cannot access some local government grant programs that counties can.
 - Operational Vision - if OPRD manages:
 - Light footprint approach:
 - Minimal development, basic access, staging/parking improvements as needed.
 - Host/ranger presence ~2x per week in season:
 - For litter, basic checks, and vault toilet servicing.
 - Would not develop upper quarry/staging area without local partner:
 - Lack access to certain grants and ongoing maintenance funds.
 - Strategic Concern about Branding:
 - Once site carries State Parks brand or appears on state website, visits likely to surge:
 - Increases pressure on local law enforcement and infrastructure.
- ODF:
 - 160-acre Weyerhaeuser Parcel:
 - Stand age:
 - Approximately 30+ years, previously harvested and replanted.
 - ODF does not plan to include it in its Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP):
 - Apply riparian conservation standards and standard survey/avoidance measures.
 - Parcel might see thinning or density management:
 - Final clear-cut harvest is unlikely.
 - Addresses Marion County's concern about HCP overlay on Weyerhaeuser acreage.
 - Recreation Management Capacity:
 - Managed under Ben's leadership for Northwest Oregon Area, with:
 - One permanent NRS1.
 - One seasonal Forest Management Technician.
 - ODF does not actively patrol Abiqua:
 - Limited staff.
 - No solid use counts.
 - High summer use linked to Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) access and fire season variations.
 - Potential Role in Partnership:
 - ODF is open to collaboration, especially around:
 - Upper quarry area as staging/parking for OHVs and hikers.
 - Road/trail considerations across their adjoining lands.
 - Site is seeing increased exposure due to influencers and social media.
- Marion County:
 - Overall Position:
 - Clear public safety and recreation value, but significant concerns:
 - Ongoing operations and maintenance costs.
 - Law enforcement staffing and response.
 - Reliance on uncertain, cyclical grants.

- Interest in a long-term runway similar to Santiam Park:
 - OPRD leading while County evaluates real costs and impacts before considering transfer.
- Operational / Parks Concerns
 - Parks budget is already constrained:
 - Existing parks have a large maintenance backlog.
 - Bare-minimum estimate from Parks staff:
 - Roughly \$30,000/year to provide minimal service.
 - Trash, restroom, if installed, and trail checks.
 - Distance and staffing:
 - Scotts Mills and Crooked Finger are difficult to reach routinely:
 - Abiqua would stretch current crews further.
 - Improvements likely to increase visitation and maintenance.
- Law Enforcement / Sheriff's Office Concerns
 - Current condition:
 - North Fork and Crooked Finger/Scotts Mills are high use with frequent incidents.
 - Deputy coverage is often daily in season for Crooked Finger:
 - Resources are thin.
 - Sheriff estimates:
 - Effective coverage for Abiqua and Crooked Finger would include a dedicated deputy Full-Time Equivalent (FTE):
 - About \$250k/year with overhead.
 - There is year-round work in area to justify an FTE:
 - Funding is the barrier.
 - ATV grant funding:
 - One deputy already funded through OPRD ATV grants.
 - ATV program has surplus capacity statewide:
 - Grants ranging from low six figures to over \$1M.
 - Interest in expanding ATV grant use to support Crooked Finger/Abiqua enforcement:
 - Needs a sustainable, multi-year approach.
- Grants and Revenue:
 - County charges day-use parking fees at several parks at \$10/day.
 - About 40% compliance at Scotts Mills:
 - Limited enforcement staff,
 - Lack of license-plate based technology.
 - County recognizes:
 - One-time capital grants can help with trail, road, staging, and facility improvements:
 - Do not provide reliable, ongoing funding.
 - Require or imply local match or backfill if costs continue after grant cycles.
- Safety and Liability:
 - Commissioners and Sheriff emphasize:
 - Trail is steep and hazardous:
 - With known serious injuries and difficult rescues.
 - Trail and access need improvement for visitor safety and responder safety (search and rescue, extractions).
 - County does not want to formalize or promote access without:
 - A plan and funding for safer trail alignment/improvements,
 - Clear understanding of liability and response obligations.
- Preferred Process / Partnership Structure

- Marion County requests:
 - Operational plan and cost estimate from OPRD outlining:
 - Service levels.
 - Staffing assumptions.
 - Maintenance responsibilities.
 - Anticipated grant usage.
- A phased approach:
 - Continued OPRD ownership and initial management,
 - Parallel work on operational plan, funding strategy, and ATV grant expansion,
 - Later decision point on any lease/IGA and potential transfer.
- County wants parks staff, Sheriff's command, and grants staff involved early in planning to align grant strategy with operational reality.

3. Other

-All

- Technology for Parking/Compliance:
 - License plate-based systems and automated license plate readers (ALPR) for parking fee enforcement.
 - Difference between with Marion County model:
 - Pay-and-display, limited enforcement
 - Newer systems at Silver Falls and Salem parking garages.
- Could use ALPR at choke point, then back-office processing of violations:
 - Would still require dedicated staff time.
- Level of Development vs. Managing Demand:
 - Tension between:
 - Keeping Abiqua relatively rustic and hard to reach to discourage excessive visitation.
 - Safety imperative to improve trails and access for visitors and rescuers.
 - Consensus that upper quarry area is logical site for:
 - Staging/parking,
 - Possible vault toilet,
 - ATV trailhead infrastructure if funded.
- Visibility and Social Media:
 - Sheriff notes a drone-influencer video has significantly increased Abiqua's profile:
 - Likely driving additional visitation regardless of formal park status.
 - Even without promotion by County/State, online exposure will continue.

4. Next Steps

-All

- OPRD – Operational Plan & Grant Information:
 - OPRD to:
 - Develop draft operational and management concept for Abiqua Falls:
 - Management model.
 - Service levels.
 - Estimated annual O&M costs.
 - Potential roles for ODF and Marion County.
 - Use of LWCF and other OPRD resources.
 - Provide written information on relevant grant programs:

- ATV grants.
 - Timelines, eligibility, typical award ranges, and key constraints.
- Marion County – Internal Coordination:
 - Kevin Thompson to:
 - Coordinate with Guy Rodriguez to:
 - Conduct joint operational and maintenance planning exercise.
 - Clarify possible division of responsibilities.
 - Identify grant-supported vs. county-funded components.
 - Commander Matt Wilkinson and grants analyst Laura to:
 - Review current ATV grant structure.
 - Explore options to expand or reconfigure ATV grants to support:
 - Additional Crooked Finger/Abiqua enforcement time.
 - Potential equipment needs.
- Financial Information:
 - Nick Hunter to:
 - Provide current general-fund contribution to ATV-funded deputy position.
 - To understand how much additional support is needed for new or expanded FTE.
- Work Group / Follow-up Meeting
 - Establish a work group including:
 - OPRD - Operations & Grants.
 - ODF.
 - Marion County Public Works/Parks.
 - Marion County Sheriff's Office - Operations & Grants.
 - Timeline:
 - Work group to meet in the coming weeks.
 - Bring draft operational plan, cost estimates, and grant strategy:
 - Follow-up work session by end of October.
- Decision Framework:
 - At work session, use operational plan and funding analysis to:
 - Assess whether Marion County can:
 - Enter into an IGA/lease for day-to-day management, or
 - Support phased approach with OPRD continuing as primary manager while partnerships and funding solidify.
 - Clarify if County wishes to pursue longer-term path to eventual ownership similar to Santiam Park model.

Adjourned – time: 11:58 a.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L. White