

TO: Marion County Public Safety Coordinating Council
FROM: Chief Trevor Womack
Salem Police Department
DATE: January 13, 2026
SUBJECT: **WALLACE MARINE PARK**

This memorandum summarizes the Salem Police Department's work to mitigate public health and safety concerns associated with unmanaged camping at Wallace Marine Park. The city and Polk County have jurisdictional authority; however, the park sits adjacent to Marion County, so a comprehensive approach involving all three jurisdictions is being discussed.

BACKGROUND

During the pandemic, Salem temporarily allowed camping in developed areas of two parks—Wallace Marine and Cascades Gateway—as a harm-reduction step tied to constrained shelter capacity and reducing COVID exposure risk. Camping in both parks significantly increased during this period, with an estimated 200-300 people camping in each park.

In June of 2021, the city ended its park camping allowance. Enforcement of the regular camping ban resumed first at Cascades Gateway Park, with a gradual wind-down and outreach and clearing effort. That park was closed for cleaning and restoration efforts from August 2021 until late July 2022.

Mitigating camping in Wallace Marine Park began in 2022, though clearing the park's wooded areas remains a challenge, with periodic removals and ongoing impacts.

To better address health and safety concerns posed by unmanaged encampments in 2022, the city funded two police officer positions, known as the Homeless Services Team (HST), along with sanitation staff, to create the Salem Outreach and Livability Services (SOS) team. Alongside various service providers, and in accordance with [State law and city ordinance](#), HST/SOS employs a model of outreach, sanitation, and targeted enforcement. While the team made progress, citywide demand exceeded capacity as the small team provided coverage only four days per week.

CURRENT SITUATION

The city's goal is to conclude camping at Wallace Marine Park entirely, similar to the work completed at Cascades Gateway Park, to (1) be consistent with Salem Revised Code which prohibits overnight sheltering in parks, (2) recognize that a park is not designed for human

habitation, (3) address the environmental and natural habitat concerns, and (4) ensure parks are available for intended patron use.

In late 2025, HST/SOS staffing increased to provide seven-day-per-week coverage as part of the [Safe, Clean, and Healthy Salem](#) initiative, doubling the team's capacity to impact unmanaged, illegal camping within parks and on public property. The team now dedicates one week per month, or 25% of its time, to ending illegal camping at Wallace Marine Park while connecting those in need with available services.

The Safe, Clean and Healthy Salem initiative also increased police presence in downtown and northeast Salem since July through overtime assignments. Through monthly strategy meetings known as Intelligence, Communication and Planning (ICAP), officers are assigned specific areas and objectives based upon call and crime data, and in support of the work being done by HST. Feedback from business and community members has been positive. This effort is temporarily funded through salary savings.

Providing consistent, ongoing attention at locations such as Wallace Marine Park is expected to significantly reduce the prevalence of unmanaged encampments and improve public safety, cleanliness, and health.

CONSIDERATIONS

Crime

The Salem Police Department seeks to address criminal behaviors regardless of any person's housing status. When violence or serious property crime occurs, arrests and jail lodging can and do happen in both Polk and Marion County. However, for lower-level offenses, including Salem Revised Code violations, interrupting cycles of negative behavior through jail lodging is limited, more so in Marion County.

Civil Commitment

A high percentage of Salem's unsheltered population suffers from severe emotional and behavioral health challenges, leaving them at high risk for increased suffering while unwilling or unable to voluntarily accept services. While recent legislative changes lowered the threshold for civil commitment, there remains no effective means or capacity to move individuals from the streets into secure treatment facilities involuntarily.

Substance Use Disorder

A high percentage of Salem's unsheltered population is experiencing substance use disorder. Felony drug possession crimes once provided an additional tool to interrupt addictive behaviors and mandate the uptake of treatment services. Recent misdemeanor [recriminalization statutes](#) in Oregon (HB 4002) provide little consequence and jail is no longer a likely option given [reforms to the pretrial release system](#) (SB 48).