

Agreement reached on St. George Reef Lighthouse

October 3, 2021



Following a year-long lapse of a lease agreement and other necessary approvals, the St. George Reef Lighthouse Preservation Society is one fog-horn signal away from being able to pursue continued renovations, and COVID-19 willing, helicopter-accessed tours of the historic landmark.

In June of this year, the preservation society reached an agreement for a \$300, 25-year lease with the county of Del Norte to oversee the lighthouse. The new lease piggybacks a previous lease from 1995, which had expired a year ago. The lease needed a nod from the United States Department of the Interior - the agency tasked with deciding which nonprofit or government entity is best able to provide permanent protections for lighthouses.

According to Guy Towers, president of the preservation society, an insurance policy that allows volunteers, crews and beacon enthusiasts to fly out to the lighthouse was secured over the summer, and approval from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is pending and should be approved by the end of the year. The latter and final approval is to ensure that ecosystems and habitats at and around the lighthouse won't be harmed.

"Our goal is to return the structure to what it used to look like," said Towers, who has been president of the preservation society since 1989.

Proposed restorations include new coats of paint, installing wainscoting, new flooring and building bunk beds that replicate the way the rooms looked while under control of its first keeper in 1892. There are also ongoing maintenance issues.

Crescent City resident Clarke Moore installed solar system batteries and worked on the lighthouse's solar array over the Spring, but said it's unlikely the light continues to shine.

"We have to get out there a couple of times a year to deal with the battery," he said. "This has been one of the most challenging places to do anything. The light room is 100 feet off the water, and when working on the battery and cables there can be horrendous weather."

There is some debate whether lighthouses - with their bright lights that cast yellow hues across blankets of fog or horns that warn seafarers of perilous rocky coasts, are as necessary as they used to be. Yet, it's hard to imagine the coast of Oregon and California without them.

"This lighthouse is a treasure," said Moore. "Everything about it is spectacular."

The remote lighthouse sits six miles off the coast of Point St. George and three miles southeast of Crescent City. Waves crash against the granite-slabbed structure on all sides when tempered weather flares. Previous workers have lost their lives tending to the majestic tower, but that was a long time ago and thanks to modern-day nautical charts, Global Positioning Systems and reliable weather forecasts, conservationists and devotees can set foot from heli-pad to lighthouse stairwell under more temperate weather conditions. Towers said they hope to re-open the lighthouse to the public in 2022.

Until then, preservation society volunteer John Zimmerman said the nonprofit is seeking all skill sets to work on the lighthouse, including painters, carpenters, engine repair specialists and volunteers willing to answer phones and sort mail. For information, call 541-254-3851. Donations can also be sent to P.O. Box 577, Crescent City, CA 95531. For information about the lighthouse or future tours, please visit www.stgeorgereeflighthouse.us.