The records of the State Highway Commission's hearings to determine whether or not to ban motor vehicles from Oregon beaches presented a fascinating picture of citizen activism and governmental reaction in the early days of the environmental movement. The hearings were mandated as part of new beach legislation passed in 1969 that allowed certain interested parties to petition the Highway Commission to review the rules concerning motor vehicle access to beaches adjacent to their residences or properties. However the Committee's original intentions were undermined by the resultant widespread interest in pushing for a more complete ban on motor vehicles over the whole of the coast.

The records of the hearings consist of recordings and transcripts, large aerial maps and press releases from the Commission. But the bulk of the records are correspondence from concerned citizens expressing their views about Oregon's coast in general. These concerned citizens were residents of the major population centers in the Willamette Valley who lacked standing to petition, but still wanted their voices heard, in favor of protecting the coast as a pristine refuge from the depredations of modern life. There was also a disconnect between these concerned citizens' desires to protect and the wishes of the people who actually lived in coastal communities year-round, who saw motor vehicle use on the beaches as vital to their livelihoods.

These records became the basis for a research paper I wrote in graduate school, where I examined the hearings and the controversies they provoked. I thought the interactions between state government technocrats and concerned citizens showed a nuance that I had not previously suspected. The idea that banning cars from beaches would be at all controversial was somewhat strange and I wanted to understand the background.

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