CASCADE LOCKS — A team of Portland State University master's degree candidates, also known as the Celilo Planning Studio, has received a national award from the American Planning Association for its work in the town of Cascade Locks.

Residents and local leaders hope that this new focus on trail-based economic development will help the community create jobs and earn a reputation as an outdoor recreation destination in the Gorge.

The APA's Student Project Awards for 2013, which are given to only three student groups across the country, recognize community planning projects that are innovative and can serve as role models for other communities.

The PSU winning plan provides a comprehensive guide to city planners that will enable the completion of an interconnected pedestrian and bike trail system that will tie together the Pacific Crest Trail, local newly developed trails and Historic Columbia River State Trail. The improved network will serve as an economic driver for the city's economy.

"This award is as much a recognition of the community as of the plan itself," said Celilo Planning Studio team member Sarah Bronstein. According to Bronstein, the award category recognizes the on-the-ground work and community momentum generated through the process. Celilo Planning Studio earned an award for "implementation of the planning process," which involved extensive work with residents and administrative staff from the city.

The PSU project, called "Connect Cascade Locks: a Recreational Trails Plan for Economic Development," was conducted between January and June of 2012 for the Port of Cascade Locks.

The purpose of the plan was to develop a community driven concept for a regionally integrated trail network and a thriving trail-oriented business base in Cascade Locks.

Cascade Locks has been hard at work establishing a new world-class sailing beach, planning for the September opening of a multi-use trail connection to Portland, and completing a Frisbee golf course.

Local events include mountain bike and cyclocross races and Pacific Crest Trail Days. Recognizing that increasing numbers of trail users will seek refreshment after a hard day's play outside, a local pub has launched an expanded menu and hours under new ownership, and a new brewing company is looking to establish roots in the town this summer.

"The most important thing we learned is that a great place to live is also a great place to visit," said Celilo Planning Studio team member Sara Morrissey. "The focus was on enhancing the amenities in town for the residents, and we know that it will increase the number of visitors as well."

Morrissey and Bronstein, along with the remaining team — Michael Ahillen, Ellen Dorsey, Chloe Ritter and Danielle Fuchs — will be recognized for their work at the APA conference in Chicago in April.

See the entire plan at http://bit.ly/1f5YQJU.

For more information, contact Holly Howell, Port of Cascade Locks marketing and development manager, at hhowell@portofcasadelocks.org or 541-374-8619.

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— SARAH BRONSTEIN

The students conducted a trail user and community survey, and held local workshops and an open house.

The final plan makes recommendations for trail and business amenities and trail stewardship, and has been adopted by the Planning Commission, the City Council and the local Tourism Committee.

As a town of 1,100 residents