



Willamette Falls Locks COMMISSION

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Oregon Governor Kate Brown Allocates \$7.5 Million to Reopen Willamette Falls Locks

SALEM, Ore.—Oregon Governor Kate Brown recently released her proposed 2019 budget, which includes \$7.5 million in Oregon State Lottery bonds to help fund the repair and reopening of the Willamette Falls Locks. Pending legislative approval, the Lottery dollars combined with federal money from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would be used to support the necessary repairs to get the Locks reopened and operational. The Corps, which currently owns the Locks, has estimated that it could fund a portion of the structural and safety repairs necessary, approximately \$3 million, before transferring ownership to another entity.

The Willamette Falls Locks Commission is comprised of 23 members, 17 appointed by Governor Brown and six non-voting legislator members appointed by legislative leadership. The Commission is tasked with advising state, local and regional government agencies on the development and implementation of policies relating to the repair, reopening, operation and maintenance of the Willamette Falls navigation canal and Locks. That includes facilitating the transfer of ownership from the Corps.

“I’m so appreciative of Governor Brown’s commitment to restoring the historic Willamette Falls Locks and the surrounding area,” said West Linn Mayor Russ Axelrod, Chair of the Willamette Falls Locks Commission. “While this won’t solve all of our financing needs, this money would help us clear a major funding hurdle and help us reopen the Locks to Oregonians and visitors to our state.”

State and federal funding would provide the capital investments to repair and reopen the Locks, including seismic upgrading, and long-term operation and maintenance funding approaches are being evaluated by the Commission. The Commission intends to find a new owner, most likely a State agency, to provide long-term public stewardship of the Locks.

According to a [report](#) by ECONorthwest, reopening the Locks could create nearly \$100 million in combined transportation and recreation benefits for Oregonians, return navigational access to the upper- and lower-Willamette River, reduce freight traffic from Portland roadways, and increase our region’s resiliency to address future disasters such as a Cascadia earthquake.

The study found that over the next 30 years, there would be:

- Transportation benefits of \$12-\$49 million
- Recreation benefits of \$12-\$50 million
- 80,000-220,000 truck trips removed from Portland area roads
- 11,000-15,400 metric tons of nitrogen oxide reduced – which would contribute to cleaner air

- 11,000-32,000 metric tons of CO₂ reduced

Located on the Willamette River in West Linn, the Willamette Falls Locks opened in 1873, but were decommissioned and given a “non-operational status” in December 2011 due to failing gate anchors and the need for expensive repairs. A lack of potential national economic benefit has prevented the Corps from justifying requests for federal funding to repair and reopen the Locks.

More information about the Willamette Falls Locks Commission is available [online](#). Detailed information is available online about [SB 256](#), which the Oregon legislature passed in 2017 to establish the Willamette Falls Locks Commission.

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