

Willamette Falls Locks

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What are the Willamette Falls Locks?

- The Willamette Falls Locks, which opened in 1873, are located on the west bank of the Willamette River in West Linn, Ore.
- The Locks were built to allow marine vessels to bypass the Falls and move timber and agricultural products to world markets.
- The Locks are currently owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Why were the Locks shut down?

- The Army Corps of Engineers closed the Locks and gave them a “non-operational status” in December 2011 due to failing gate anchors, needed repairs and a lack of potential national economic benefit to justify requests for federal funding to repair and reopen the Locks.

What are the options for the Willamette Falls Locks?

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is in the final stages of adopting a Final Disposition Report on the Locks. It is expected that the report will recommend doing some safety and seismic repairs to the Locks to prepare them for transfer to a new entity. This plan would not restore the Locks to operational status.
- The Willamette Falls Locks Commission is investigating options for an entity to take over operation of the Locks from the Corps. The new owner could be either private, public or a combination of both.
- If a transferee is not found, the Corps intends to decommission the Locks, which would involve installing a concrete bulkhead to maintain the dam and hydroelectric power plant, preventing future use of the Locks by Oregonians and visitors.

What are the economic benefits of reopening the Locks?

- Recommissioning the Locks would bring significant economic, cultural and recreational benefits to the region’s residents and businesses.
- Reopening the Locks would create millions of dollars in transportation and recreation benefits for Oregonians, while reducing freight traffic from Portland roadways.
- According to a Local Economic Potential Study conducted by Portland-based ECONorthwest, Oregon would see tremendous economic benefits from recommissioning the Locks. 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

What are the transportation benefits of the Locks?

- Shipping aggregate by barge reduces shipping costs by approximately 18 percent compared to trucking. Reopening the Locks will provide millions of dollars of cost savings for aggregate shippers above the Falls.
- Reopening the Locks would provide much needed access to moorage sites above the Falls for commercial vessels at a reduced price compared to moorage sites below the Falls. These savings amount to tens of millions of dollars of reduced moorage costs over 30 years.
- Reducing freight traffic could reduce the production of greenhouse gas carbon dioxide by 46 percent and production of nitrogen oxides by 93 percent, compared to trucking. Nitrogen oxides are respiratory irritants and contribute to the formation of acid rain and haze.

What are the recreation benefits of the Locks?

- Quantified benefits associated with recreation, including guided overnight cruises and use by personal watercraft (e.g., motor boats and canoes) range from an estimated \$12-\$51 million over 30 years.
- Guided day tours, on-site visitation and future tourism bolstered by potential development plans would all generate additional benefits beyond those quantified.

What are the cultural and historical connections to the Willamette Falls Locks?

- Reopening the Locks and creating a public access point for the Willamette Falls holds tremendous historical and cultural value to Oregonians.
- The Locks are designated on the National Register of Historic Places and as a State Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.
- In 2012, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the Locks a National Treasure that is under threat.
- Native American tribal history in the area dates back at least 14,000 years, once serving as a place to collect food and fiber and to trade with other tribes, as well as a spiritual and ceremonial gathering place for members of the region's tribes.
- Representatives from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde are on the Willamette Falls Locks Commission.

Are there benefits to reopening the Locks in the event of a major earthquake?

- During the short- and long-term recovery phases in the aftermath of the Cascadia Subduction Zone Earthquake, the Locks could provide critical transportation services long before the region's bridges and roadways return to functionality.
- These services include moving reconstruction materials, food and fuel; reconnecting family members separated at the time of the earthquake; and transporting volunteers and other recovery workers to damaged areas.

What is the Willamette Falls Locks Commission?

- In 2017, the Oregon Legislature passed SB 256, creating the Willamette Falls Locks Commission.
- Oregon Governor Kate Brown appointed the 23-member Commission, which held its first meeting in April 2018.
- West Linn Mayor Russ Axelrod was elected to chair the Commission.
- Clackamas County Commissioner Martha Schrader and Clackamas County resident representative Sandy Carter are the Commission's co-vice chairs.

- The Commission will work to advise state, local and regional stakeholders on the development and implementation of state policies and funding relating to the repair, reopening, operation and maintenance of the Willamette Falls navigation canal and Locks.
- The Commission will also oversee transfer of ownership from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to an organization that takes responsibility for the operation and financing of the navigation canal and Locks.
- The Commission will meet several times over the next two years to determine the best action plan.
- Members of the Commission include elected officials, county and city representatives, community members, business owners, representatives from environmental groups, and tourism industry leaders, among others. Members include:
 - Russ Axelrod, West Linn Mayor
 - Joe Bernert, Clackamas County business and economic development representative
 - Sam Brentano, Marion County Board of Commissioners
 - Chad Brown, Environmental and ecological nonprofit representative
 - Gary Burke, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
 - Sandy Carter, Clackamas County resident representative
 - Danielle Cowan, Clackamas County tourism and recreation representative
 - MG Devereux, State Parks and Recreation Department
 - Betty Dominguez, Metro Regional Government
 - Jack Giffen Jr., Tribal Council Member, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
 - Daniel Holladay, Oregon City Mayor
 - Karen Homolac, Oregon Business Development Department
 - Mark Meek, Oregon State Representative
 - Alan Olsen, Oregon State Senator
 - Julie Parrish, Oregon State Representative
 - Bill Post, Oregon State Representative
 - Stan Primozich, Yamhill County Board of Commissioners
 - Andrea Salinas, Oregon State Representative
 - Paul Scarlett, Oregon Department of Transportation
 - Martha Schrader, Clackamas County Board of Commissioners
 - Scott Starr, Wilsonville City Council
 - Rob Wagner, Oregon State Senator

Where can I find out more about the Locks and the Commission?

- More information about the Commission is available online at <http://orsolutions.org/osproject/2018-willamette-falls-locks-commission>
- Details about SB 256, which the Oregon legislature passed in 2017 to establish the Willamette Falls Locks Commission, are available at <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2017R1/Measures/Overview/SB256>