



Willamette Falls Locks

COMMISSION

Legislative Briefing Sheet

Willamette Falls Locks: Funding Options for the Oregon Legislature

Oregon Governor Kate Brown has included \$7.5 million in Oregon State Lottery bonds in her proposed 2019 budget to help fund the repair and reopening of the Willamette Falls Locks. Reopening the Locks would create millions of dollars in transportation and recreation benefits for Oregonians, return navigational access to the upper—and lower—Willamette River, reduce freight traffic from Portland roadways, add significant historical and cultural value to Native American tribes and Oregonians, and increase our region's resiliency to address future disasters such as the Cascadia earthquake.

Pending legislative approval, 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 minimally operational.

What this funding does and doesn't cover

A 2018 independent engineering analysis by KPFF found that the 146-year-old Locks are in remarkably good condition, but given their age, new costs could arise during the repair and upgrade of the Locks.

While the Governor has proposed \$7.5 million from Lottery bonds to get started on repairs, the Willamette Falls Locks Commission is requesting \$15.535 million from the State Legislature to fund repairs and upgrades, and provide some annual and periodic maintenance. Funding would cover: seepage and erosion repairs, seismic upgrades, gudgeon anchors, walkways, valves, fire protection, electrical systems, hydraulic power units, a minor additional environmental review, control systems and lighting. The Corps is expected to commit a portion of the structural and safety repairs necessary before transferring ownership to another entity.

Unknowns and contingencies to consider: seepage and erosion could increase; the scope/cost of seismic upgrades could change; and major flooding could occur. Contingencies are included at 30% for all of the cost estimates since they are based upon a high level of engineering, and a 20% overhead for engineering, permitting and project management.

What will HB 2304 do?

Authorizes issuance of Lottery bonds to finance the repair and reopening of the Willamette Falls navigation canal and locks.

What will HB 2305 do?

Authorizes Department of State Lands in partnership with other agencies or entities to repair and reopen the Willamette Falls navigation canal and locks.

What will HB 5030 do?

The State Treasurer is authorized to issue lottery bonds in an amount that produces \$7.5 million in net proceeds for costs to repair and reopen the Willamette Falls navigation canal and locks.

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.
- The Locks were built to allow marine vessels to bypass the Falls and move timber and agricultural products to world markets.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers currently owns the Locks.
- The Corps 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 economic benefits of reopening the Locks?*

\$12-\$49
million

Transportation benefits

\$12-\$50
million

Recreation benefits

**80,000-
220,000**

Truck trips removed from
Portland area roads

**11,000-
32,000**

Metric tons of CO2
reduced

**Figures represent benefits over the next 30 years.*

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. Creating a public access point for the Willamette Falls also holds tremendous historical and cultural value to Native Americans and Oregonians.



What are the options for the Willamette Falls Locks?

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is in the final stages of issuing a Final Disposition Report and Director’s Decision 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.
- If a new owner/transferee is not found, The Corps intends to decommission the Locks, installing a concrete bulkhead to seal up the Locks, and preventing future use by Oregonians.

Willamette Falls Locks Commission

- In 2017, the Oregon State Legislature passed SB 256, creating the Commission.
- In 2018, Governor Kate Brown appointed the 23-member Commission to oversee the potential recommissioning of the Willamette Falls Locks.
- Commission members include elected officials, county and city representatives, tribal leaders, community members, business owners, representatives from environmental groups, and tourism industry leaders, among others.

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More information about the commission’s work is available at <http://orsolutions.org/osproject/WFLC>

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