

Topic: Willamette Falls Locks Informational Briefing

Committee Briefer: Panel Speakers:

Clackamas County Commissioner Martha Schrader, Chair of the Willamette Falls Locks Working Group

West Linn Mayor Russ Axelrod

Trent Wilson, Government Affairs Specialist, Clackamas County

Congresswoman Darlene Hooley, for Clackamas County and the Willamette Falls Locks Working Group

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Major Points of Testimony:

- I. Most important point* The Willamette Falls Locks were opened in 1873 to allow passage around Willamette Falls, the second largest waterfall by volume in the U.S. behind Niagara Falls. 138 years later, in response to dwindling commercial tonnage passing through the Locks, the owner of the Locks, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ("Corps"), essentially closed the Locks to marine traffic. This decision effectively cut the Willamette River in two, and the Locks have been deteriorating since that time. The Corps is now engaged in a Final Disposition Study for the Locks to determine the future of the Locks. Options could include disposing of the Locks to a private party and thereby removing them as a public asset, keeping the Locks in a caretaker status with minimal mitigation, or permanently closing the facility.
- II. Second most important point.* The Locks are significant for Oregon and the region for their historic, cultural, recreational value, as well as their potential for tourism, marine transport and economic development. In 2015, the Legislature established a Willamette Falls Locks State Task Force through SB 131. The Task Force has issued its recommendation to establish a Willamette Falls Locks Commission, which would bring together state, regional and local governments, Tribes, stakeholders, businesses and citizens to partner or negotiate with the Corps for the repair, reopening, sustained operation and maintenance of the Locks. SB 256 was filed in the 2017 Session to implement the recommendations of the Task Force. The bill passed unanimously out of the Senate Business and Transportation Committee on February 15, with a subsequent referral to Ways and Means.
- III. Tertiary level (important) point* The closure of the Locks in 2011 and a permanent closure of the Locks prohibit marine transport between the lower and the upper Willamette River, thereby preventing the river's usage in a seismic or other catastrophic event. The repair and reopening of the Locks could include seismic upgrades, which could in turn allow for the river to be used for the transport of goods or people following a seismic or catastrophic event.

Evidence/Supporting Material: Citation of sources, annotated list of attachments (if any) Materials include the Willamette Falls Locks State Task Force Recommendations, a letter from the Mayors' Metropolitan

Consortium and The Willamette Locks Economic Potential Report dated September 30, 2014 (which also contains historical information about the Locks).

If advocating for passage of legislation include evidence of at least the following:

- A. Significance of the issue*
- B. Harm caused by perpetuation of the status quo (not making the changes included in the measure)*
- C. Inherency of the problems identified within the status quo*
- D. Explanation of how proposal shall improve the situation*
- E. Clarification of the likely benefits (outweighing potential costs/risks)*

If opposing passage of legislation include evidence of at least the following:

- A. Continuation of the status quo represents the best, most effective/efficient choice at this moment*
- B. Proposal requires excessive specific adjustment/improvements for reasonable consideration*

If suggesting adjustment/improvements to proposed legislation include the following details:

- A. How adjustment shall improve the proposal*
- B. How adjustment shall function: the mechanical aspects of your recommendation*
- C. Explanation of the net differences in form, function, and responsibilities (costs)*