

Clackamas County Tourism Development Council

Jodi Carson - Chair

Willamette Falls Heritage
Area Coalition

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Kids Play Place

2051 Kaen Rd.
Oregon City, OR
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January 4, 2021

Senator Peter Courtney, Senate President

Speaker Tina Kotek, House Speaker

Members of the Oregon Legislature

On behalf of the Tourism Development Council (TDC) of Clackamas County, I would like to urge your support of HB2564 that would create a Willamette Falls Locks Authority. The establishment of this new public corporation would provide a means of conveying ownership of the historic Willamette Falls Locks from the US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) to a state authorized entity that would be responsible for repairing and reopening the Locks. After which, it would manage and operate the Locks as a public asset for the benefit of Oregonians and visiting recreators alike.

The Locks were closed in 2011 after the USACE determined that corrosion of the gates had compromised their integrity. Prior to that, Locks served as a way for commercial and recreational boats to navigate up and down the river for 138 years. The USACE concluded the Locks no longer facilitated the passage of enough commercial tonnage to justify requests for federal funding to repair and reopening. That calculation did not take into account the recreation value of lockages. The closure of the Locks impeded full navigability of the Willamette and resulted in "two river" system; the area above Willamette Falls and the 25 miles below the Falls to the Columbia River.

A coalition of local, regional and state partners has been working with the USACE and Oregon Solutions on options to repair and reopen the Locks. This effort was undertaken because coalition partners recognize there is more value associated with Willamette Falls Locks than can be calculated by commercial tonnage alone.

A report issued by ECONorthwest in January 2018 estimates that over a 30-year period after being reopened, the transportation-related economic benefits of opening the Locks would be between \$12-\$49 million. For the recreation sector, the report estimated economic benefits of between \$12-\$50 million for the same 30-year period. The ECONorthwest recreational benefit estimates parallel findings contained in a Water-based Tourism Study and Strategic Plan that Clackamas County Tourism commissioned in 2018. That study concluded there is considerable potential for increased tourism and recreational activity in the area should the Locks be reopened. Crane Associates, Inc., the firm hired to conduct the study, estimates demand from non-commercial recreational boaters for lockages at 15,708 annually.

From an environmental standpoint, the ECONorthwest analysis calculated that having the Locks opened would reduce commercial truck traffic by 80,000-220,000 trips over a 30-year period and would reduce CO2 emissions by 11,000-32,000 metric tons.

Beyond the numbers, the Willamette Falls Locks is a site of significant historical, cultural and industrial heritage relevance that are deserving of restoration. They are a key feature of Oregon's first state designated heritage area. They are listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. And, the Locks factor prominently into the request and plans to establish a Willamette Falls and Landings National Heritage Area.

Because we recognize the value of the Locks, and the potential that could be recognized if reopened, we have been an engaged partner in effort to bring this asset back on line. In addition to time and interest, we have invested in the project. In 2017, Clackamas County Tourism secured \$100,000 in regional cooperative tourism program funds to help support work needed to bring a plan forward.

The recommendation to establish a public corporation is the result of years of study and collaboration. The Willamette Locks Authority represents that best option available for repairing and reopening the Locks, and restoring the Willamette River as a "one river" system. Action in this session is needed to move this work forward before this truly unique opportunity is lost. For this reason we urge your support of HB2564.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jody Carson" followed by a horizontal flourish.

Jody Carson
Chair, Clackamas County
Tourism Development Council