

HCR 20 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs

Prepared By: Regina Wilson, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 5/9, 5/11

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Commemorates the 150th anniversary of the Willamette Falls Locks opening. Congratulates those, past and present, who ensure the longevity of this historic site.

Fiscal Impact: No Fiscal Impact

Revenue Impact: No Revenue Impact

House Vote: 56-1-3

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- The Locks' historical impact on transportation
- Community interest in the Locks' history
- Recreational and cultural opportunities

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Willamette Falls Locks built in the early 1870's by the Wilamette Falls Canal and Locks Company, is located on the west bank of the Willamette River in West Linn, Oregon. It was constructed to mobilize traffic around the 40-ft high, horseshoe-shaped basalt ridge between Oregon City and West Linn. Under the guidance of Chief Superintendent Captain Issac W. Smith, Chief Engineer E.G. Tilton and Engineering Assistant J.A. Lessourd, hundreds of engineers, laborers, and stonemasons worked to ensure the project's successful, timely, completion. The Locks became a significant avenue for transport of goods throughout the region prior to the construction of the Willamette Falls Railway in 1893.

Considered the first significant navigational improvement in the United States west of the Rockies, the Locks opened to the public on January 1, 1873 to the biggest public celebration since Oregon achieved its statehood 14 years earlier. The Maria Wilkins was the first vessel to travel through the Locks. It passed through the first lock at 12:17 pm, New Year's Day, 1873.

In 1890, a flood damaged the Locks as well as the home of Lock Tender Jack Chambers. By 1899 the Locks had fallen into disrepair, and, for restoration of the Locks, the United States Army Corp of engineers began examining the feasibility of purchasing the Locks from the Portland Railway Light and Power Company. The War Department approved a \$375,000 purchase of the Locks in 1912; the purchase was completed in 1915. Under the supervision of Major H.C. Jewett and Assistant Engineer E.B. Thomson, the Corps' reconstruction of the Locks began April 1916 and completed September 1, 1917.

The Locks were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 and later designated as an Oregon Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers in 1991. December 2011, out of concern for public safety, excessive deterioration led the Corps to reclassify the Locks as nonoperational.

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With support from: the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners; the Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation; the Willamette Falls and Landings Heritage Area Coalition; Portland General Electric; numerous public officials, community leaders and community members of West Linn, Wilsonville, Clackamas County, Metro, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Rhonde and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians, the Legislative Assembly in 2021 established the Willamette Falls Locks Authority. June 2022, the Willamette Falls Locks Commission completed an agreement that transferred ownership of the Locks from the Corps to the Authority. January 1, 2023 marked the 150th anniversary of the Locks' opening.

HCR 20 recognizes the 150th anniversary of the Willamette Falls Locks' opening and congratulates those who worked tirelessly to preserve this historic structure.