



Willamette Falls Locks
AUTHORITY

1980 Willamette Falls Dr #120, PMB 195 * West Linn, OR 97068

Press Release

Contact: Christine Lewis, Chair

Phone: 503-319-1986

Email: Christine.lewis@oregonmetro.gov

Date: March 7, 2023

Contract awarded on Willamette Falls Locks construction, marking new milestone

WEST LINN, Ore. (March 7, 2023) – A project to restore river traffic around Willamette Falls reached a major milestone this month with selection of a construction firm to begin seismic preparation in anticipation of eventual transfer of the Willamette Falls Locks from the United States government to Oregonians.

The Willamette Falls Locks, built in 1873 on the northwest bank of the Willamette River, are managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and have been closed since 2011 due to structural damage.

"The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is excited to award of our construction contract, marking a significant milestone in the transfer of the Locks," said U.S. Army Corps project manager Jeff Hicks. "We are completing the seismic upgrades required to safely transfer of the facility to the Willamette Falls Locks Authority. We look forward to working collaboratively with our partners to ensure a successful and smooth transfer." The corps has earmarked \$6.2 million for its part of the upgrades.

Portland General Electric, which owns the dam at Willamette Falls Locks, did its part by reaching agreement with the Corps on allowing the construction firm to access the Locks.

"PGE has been an active participant in this project from the beginning," said Mini Sharma-Ogle, PGE's manager of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. "I'm pleased that good will between PGE and USACE helped in getting us to this milestone and we look forward to continuing this important work with the Willamette Falls Locks Authority."

The Willamette Falls Locks Authority will receive and manage the Locks on behalf of Oregonians. "The Locks have been closed since 2011," said Board Member and Clackamas County Chair Tootie Smith. "This first phase of construction is a victory, especially for the river communities that have dreamed to repair and reopen the Locks and return the Willamette River to a single navigable waterway."

Willamette Falls Authority Chair and Metro Councilor Christine Lewis agreed and thanked partners for getting the project to this point. “This project has taken so many hands over many years. When the Corps completes its work and transfers ownership in 2025, the Authority will continue to make upgrades necessary to operate. Making the river through here navigable for the public and for commerce is the goal, and now we’re one step closer.”

Over the decades, many of Oregon’s leaders have appreciated both the history of the locks and the potential for the lock’s continued contributions to Oregon’s economy and quality of life. Former Oregon Sen. Verne Duncan convened the Oregon Solutions Willamette Falls Locks Project starting in 2006.

Clackamas County Commissioners Tootie Smith and Martha Schrader took that good work and successfully advocated for the passage of SB 131 in 2015, which created a new State Task Force on the Willamette Falls Navigation Canal and Locks, chaired by former Gov. Barbara Roberts. The work of that task force eventually led to the Army Corps of Engineers’ “Draft Integrated Disposition Study and Environmental Assessment, Willamette Falls Locks”, which recommended that the property be transferred out of federal ownership and into the hands of suitable local, regional or state steward.

In 2017, SB 256 created the Willamette Falls Locks Commission to establish a steward organization able to receive the locks from the federal government. The work of the commission led to the passage of HB 2564 in 2021, which created the public corporation Willamette Falls Locks Authority, which today endeavors to carry forward the enduring history of the locks for the benefit of all Oregonians.

The mission of the Willamette Falls Locks Authority per HB 2564 is to establish ownership, oversight and management of the Willamette Falls Locks project, for the purposes of:

- Enhancing the economic vitality of Oregon through facilitating the resiliency and navigability of the Willamette River; and
- Repairing, maintaining, upgrading and operating the Willamette Falls Locks project and associated properties and facilities for commercial, transportation, recreational, cultural, historic, heritage and tourism purposes.

1873 - Willamette Falls Locks opened to much fanfare.

1915 – The Army Corps of Engineers buys the canal, and navigating around the falls becomes free to all users.

1974 – The canal and locks are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, bringing the protections of the National Historic Preservation Act.

1991 – American Society of Civil Engineers name the locks a State Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

2011 – Closure of the locks due to safety concerns and lack of federal funding

