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Clackamas County
www.clackamas.us



Willamette Falls Locks
AUTHORITY

Requesting Continued Partner Pledges for Willamette Falls Locks Authority

On behalf of the Willamette Falls Locks Authority, I'd like to thank you for your agency's partnership and early support for the work underway to restore and return the Willamette Falls Locks to community use. Your organization's engagement to date has helped establish the foundation of the Authority, helping us to move forward in our efforts to return this historically and regionally significant community asset to the community.

With the support of you, our partners, the Authority has been able to move from formation to implementation. Your early support has allowed the Authority to develop our new governance structure including establishing administrative and foundational documents, broadening the coalition across jurisdictions and sectors, and working closely with the US Army Corps of Engineers as they initiate a federally funded seismic retrofit of the Locks. And just this month, we are now engaged with a contractor to begin inspections, investigations and capital planning.

These early actions demonstrate both readiness and momentum, and they position the Authority to responsibly assume ownership and long-term management of the Locks on behalf of the region.

In 2022, the partners initially anticipated 5 years of operations funding to get the Authority off the ground and through the first round of construction. The initial funding pledges were identified as start-up funds, recognizing that we would need to obtain future pledges to complete the initial 5 years of operations funding (estimated at \$350k per year, \$1,750,000 total). In 2022, the initial "start up" pledges totaled \$755,198, leaving an unmet need of \$994,802. Fortunately, due to underspending on an annual basis (actual expenditures have remained under \$300k each of the first two fiscal years), along with unanticipated operations contributions from the State of Oregon, the amount we are anticipating for continued partner contributions to meet operational needs through 2029-30 are less than forecasted in 2022. Our remaining forecasted contribution need is now \$737,500.

Looking ahead, continued participation from the partners is essential to ensuring the successful transfer, modernization, and operation of the facility. Over the coming years, your continued support will allow the Authority to continue to make progress on:

- Negotiating and overseeing the transfer of the Locks from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers by mid-2027
- Inspecting and investigating the environmental, habitat and cultural impact of operating the locks
- Securing the remaining capital funds needed to match \$7.2 million already committed for required capital upgrades supporting modern operation and seismic redundancy (estimated at approximately \$11.4M)

- Managing capital improvements and overseeing environmental conditions
- Negotiating operating agreements and developing a permanent funding plan for operations
- Protecting and maintaining National Historic Register values through perpetual preservation agreements and partnerships
- Promoting economic, commercial, and community use of the Locks in coordination with economic development, tourism, and private-sector partners
- Returning a safe, resilient, and operational Locks facility to public use

At this stage, continued financial support from community partners will help leverage already-committed resources, reduce long-term operational risk, and ensure that the Locks are transferred and restored consistent with our community's expectations of the Authority for accountability, safety, and stewardship.

Timelines have been hopeful forecasts for this new authority, and we have had to be flexible. We thought our legislation would pass in 2019, but we had to wait until 2021. We thought we would have a new board in place within 1 year, but it took closer to 2 years for appointments. We thought the initial operations plan to get us through the first phase of construction would take 5 years, but due to delays at the Army Corps of Engineers and the transfer of real estate, it will be closer to 6 1/2 years. We recognize that each jurisdiction has its own budgeting processes, timelines, and policy considerations. Again, we are flexible. Adjustments for continued partner contributions that begin in the 2026/27 budget cycle are preferred; however, we can manage into continued partner contributions that start in the 2027/28 budget cycle if necessary.

We're prepared to provide any additional information, briefings, documentation, or coordination you may need to ensure support for continued participation and future funding decisions. We welcome the opportunity to work directly with your staff and leadership to align this effort with your agency's priorities.

Thank you for your continued partnership and leadership. Together, we are protecting a nationally significant historic resource, strengthening regional infrastructure, and returning a vital public asset to the communities it serves.

Sincerely,



Reed Wagner
Executive Director
Willamette Falls Locks Authority

Clackamas County Partner Contributions:

- Clackamas County's initial start-up pledge: \$120,000
 - Scheduled over five years
 - Clackamas County's payments received to date \$120,000

- New pledge request of Clackamas County \$120,000
 - Preferred schedule: 1-3 years

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Construction Ready Project

Restoring Operations of the Willamette Falls Locks

Willamette Falls Locks Authority Recommendation

The Willamette Falls Locks is seeking funding from the Oregon legislature for the remaining \$11.431 million during the 2026 and 2027 sessions. We were successful educating new legislators in the 2025 session and finding champions for the capital raise. This funding is critical to implement the capital upgrades necessary to make the locks seismically resilient and operational again, and reconnect the local communities via the Willamette River.

The United States Army Corps of Engineers currently owns the Locks and is in the process of transferring the property and its assets to the Authority. The transfer is scheduled for completion late 2027, at which point construction will begin. The Authority has agreed to secure an access permit with USACE which will allow pre-construction work to be completed before the transfer. Since 2009, USACE has spent \$14 million on studies, repairs, seismic upgrades, and preparing the historic Locks for transfer.

In addition to federal funding, the Authority's day-to-day operations have been funded by contributions of more than \$750,000 to date from neighboring cities, tribes, Clackamas County, PGE, and Metro. The original assumed amount identified to fund operations during the governance development, real estate transfer and locks construction phase was \$1,750,000. We are working with our local partners in 2026 to complete the funding commitments necessary to complete this critical phase.

Financial Investments from Our Partners

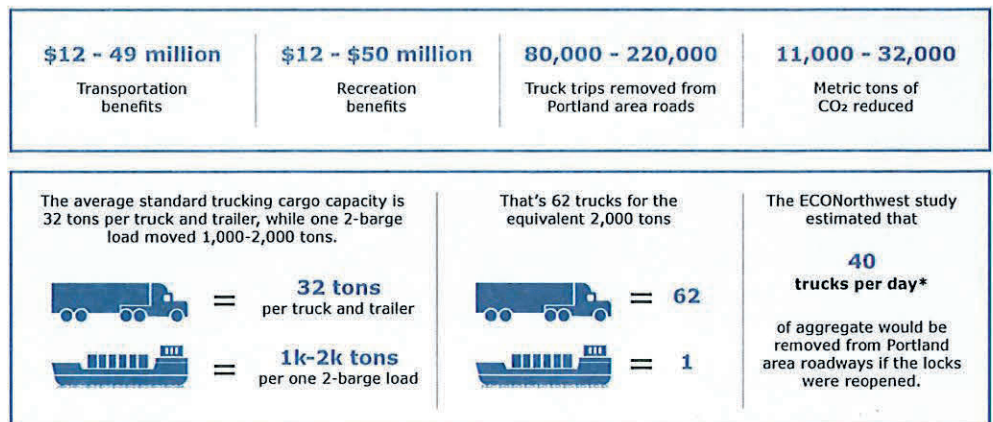
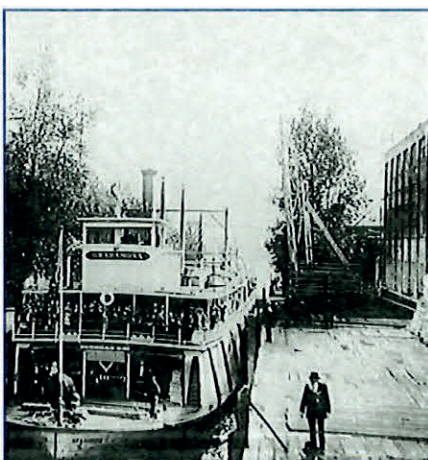
- Federal (since 2009): **\$14 million**
- Local (to date): **more than \$750,000**
- OR Legislature (2021): **\$7.25 million**

2nd Portion of State Match to Implement Repairs

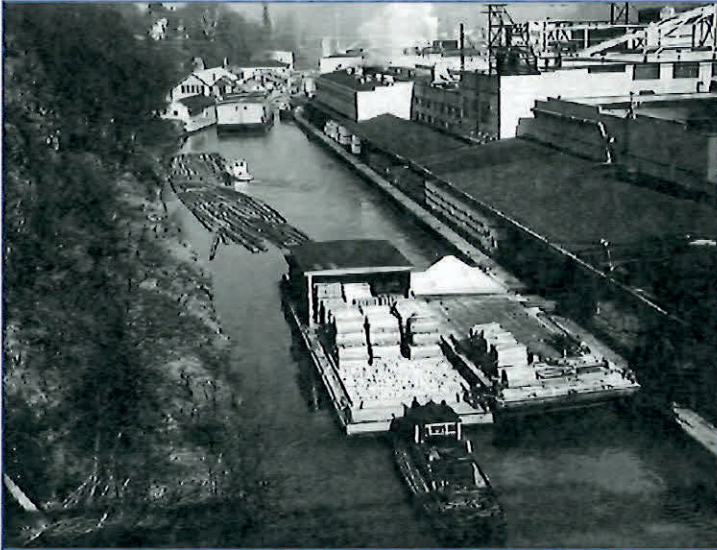
- **\$11.431 million**

Economic benefits of reopening the locks*

- › Serve as a marine transportation option in the event of a Cascadia earthquake, contributing to the region's resiliency and emergency preparedness.
- › Enhance revitalization opportunities for river fronts in cities including West Linn, Oregon City, Wilsonville and Newberg.
- › Facilitate ship maintenance of upriver maritime resources needing repairs and inspections below the current Falls bottleneck.
- › Welcome Oregonians to the 1873 Canal, an asset of the Willamette Falls State Heritage Area, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and designated as a Civil Engineering Landmark.
- › Promote collaborative economic development through historical tourism and outdoor recreational opportunities, including tours to wineries and agricultural tourism destinations in Clackamas, Yamhill and Marion County.
- › Reduce greenhouse gas carbon dioxide through barging for valley commodities that are now transported by truck. Reduce congestion and road wear on major arterials and highways.
- › Connect Willamette Valley towns. Once again offer paddlers recreational and experiential environmental learning along the 187-mile Willamette River Water Trail from Springfield to Portland.



* These numbers are estimates from a 2018 ECONW report.



History

- Locks opened January 1, **1873**, under private ownership.
- **1915** The USACE bought the Canal and Locks for \$375,000 from Portland Railway, Light & Power, providing free passage around the Falls.
- **2011** The Locks closed in December due to safety concerns, and the Locks moved to "Caretaker" status.
- **2015** The Willamette Falls Locks Task Force was established through Senate Bill 131.
- **2017** SB 256 followed the Task Force's recommendations, enlisting Oregon Solutions to facilitate a new Willamette Falls Locks Commission.
- **2021** HB 2564 established the Willamette Falls Locks Authority as a public corporation.
- **2023** The Locks celebrated its 150th birthday and USACE began seismic upgrades. Additionally, local partners began funding operations for the first phase of the Locks.
- **2025** USACE completes seismic upgrades
- **February 2026** WFLA hires firm for engineering and environmental scoping
- **2027** Anticipated real estate transfer from USACE to WFLA
- **2026-29** WFLA oversees the construction and environmental work period
- **2029-30** Anticipated opening of the Locks

Authority

Authority Board

Christine Lewis - Chair
Metro Council

Russ Axelrod - Vice Chair
Geologist and Former Mayor, West Linn

Sandy Carter - Secretary
Advocates for Willamette Falls Heritage

Denyse McGriff - Treasurer
Oregon City Mayor

David Penilton
Oregon Tourism Commission/MERC
Commission

Robert Kentta
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Siletz Indians

Chris Mercier
Vice Chair, Confederated Tribes of
Grand Ronde

Mary Baumgardner
West Linn Council President

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Preston Korst
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Authority Advisors

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Sen. Mark Meek