

February 18, 2015

**AOC SUPPORTS
ESTABLISHMENT OF A TASK FORCE ON THE
WILLAMETTE FALLS NAVIGATION CANAL AND LOCKS.
SB 131**

On February 9, 2015, the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) Legislative Committee voted unanimously to support SB 131, which would establish a task force on the Willamette Falls Navigation Canal and Locks.

AOC's members recognize that a fully navigable Willamette River has economic, health, and safety implications for the entire state. Therefore, AOC supports the gathering of information by a task force on the impacts of the canal and locks on local history and culture, economic opportunities, transportation, and emergency planning. The findings of the task force will help guide the Legislature in working with the US Army Corps of Engineers to develop a plan for sustainable operations of the Willamette Falls Navigation Canal and Locks.

Last month, AOC passed Resolution 2015-M1, In the Matter of Reopening the Willamette Falls Locks, a copy of which is attached. In addition to supporting the creation of a State Task Force, the resolution urged the Corps of Engineers to reopen the Willamette Falls Locks to general public commercial, recreational, and cultural marine traffic. The Resolution also sought the support of Oregon's Congressional delegation for the expedited repair and reopening of the Willamette Falls Locks.

AOC believes the future Willamette Falls Navigation Canal and Locks is an issue of statewide significance. We encourage your support of SB 131.

Please contact Mary Stern at mstern@aocweb.org for more information about AOC or this issue.

Resolution 2015-M1

**A RESOLUTION IN THE MATTER OF REOPENING
THE WILLAMETTE FALLS LOCKS**

WHEREAS, On January 1, 1873, the Willamette Falls Locks opened to allow passage around the waterfall at Oregon City thereby providing access to a one river system; and

WHEREAS, in 1915, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers purchased the Locks from the private operator thereby ensuring free public passage through the Locks; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, the Willamette Falls Locks were listed on the National Register of Historic Places; it was the first significant facility built to improve navigation on the Columbia-Snake River Inland Waterway system, and the most important through 1939; and

WHEREAS, in 1991, the Willamette Falls Locks was designated as a State Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers; and

WHEREAS, in 2006, Governor Kulongoski designated the Willamette Falls Locks as an Oregon Solutions project and formed the Willamette Falls Locks Oregon Solutions Task Force, which continues today as the One Willamette River Coalition, coordinated by the Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation, to preserve the Locks and support its continued operation; and

WHEREAS, the One Willamette River Coalition, which represents a partnership of businesses, local governments, and nonprofit organizations, advocates to ensure the Locks remain functional as a connector for the otherwise separate waterways of the Upper and Lower Willamette River; and

WHEREAS, on October 23, 2008, the Center for Economic Development Education and Research released a report under contract to the Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation, entitled *The Willamette Falls Locks: A Case Study Analysis of Potential Transfer Issues*; and

WHEREAS, from 2006 through 2010, funding provided to the Corps from the Oregon Department of Transportation, Clackamas County, and the U.S. Congress allowed for seasonal operations and selected structural upgrades, including \$2.2 million in funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (PL 111-5); and

WHEREAS, in November, 2011, the Willamette Falls Locks were placed into "non-operational" status and on short notice were closed to vessel passage based upon an engineering assessment that identified safety concerns of potential failure; and

WHEREAS, closure has placed a severe hardship on commercial, recreational, and tribal river users, including businesses which have used the Willamette Falls Locks for 127 years for transporting aggregate, logs, and other goods and conducting dredging and towing operations; and

WHEREAS, in March 2012, the National Trust for Historic Preservation declared the Willamette Falls Locks as one of the most threatened National Treasures, thereby providing added technical assistance; and

WHEREAS, in 2012, the Historic Preservation League of Oregon (now Restore Oregon) named the Willamette Falls Locks as one of its 10 “Most Endangered Places”; and

WHEREAS, the Locks are a primary historic asset under applications being prepared for designation of the area at the Willamette Falls as State and National Heritage Areas; and

WHEREAS, on September 23, 2013, the Corps of Engineers gave notice of their intent to initiate a public consultation process under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to determine whether the closure action had adverse effects on the historic integrity of the Locks based upon the defining qualities and features that made the Locks eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, on May 15, 2014, the Corps of Engineers released their finding of historic adverse effects under Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act and announced their intent to proceed with development of an agreement to establish how to best “avoid, minimize or mitigate” the identified adverse effect to the historic character of the Locks; and

NOW THEREFORE, the Association of Oregon Counties do hereby resolve as follows:

1. The Association of Oregon Counties urges the Corps of Engineers to reopen the Willamette Falls Locks to general public commercial, recreational, and cultural marine traffic.
2. The Association of Oregon Counties thanks the Corps of Engineers for working with local stakeholders to assess and mitigate the adverse effects of the closure and urges the Corps of Engineers to expedite the needed repairs and craft a plan for sustainable operations of the Locks.
3. The Association of Oregon Counties supports recognition of the Willamette Falls Locks in the Regional Transportation Plan and inclusion of the Willamette Falls Locks as a Metro JPACT federal priority.
4. The Association of Oregon Counties supports creation of a State Task Force to work with the Corps of Engineers to develop a plan for sustainable operations of the Willamette Falls Locks.
5. The Association of Oregon Counties urges the Oregon Congressional delegation to support the expedited repair and reopening of the Willamette Falls Locks.

Adopted this 12th day of January, 2015
By vote of the AOC Membership

Certified by:



Mike McArthur
Executive Director