



March 26, 2015

Clackamas County Board of Commissioners
Policy Position
SJM 10: Urging Congress to designate Willamette Falls and surrounding
communities as a National Heritage Area

Clackamas County supports SJM 10: The Board of County Commissioners supports SJM 10, which urges the United States Congress to designate Willamette Falls and the surrounding communities as a National Heritage Area and to appropriate funding to repair and reopen the Willamette Falls Locks.

Willamette Falls has long been a treasure of Clackamas County. Groups like the Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition and Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation have worked for years to raise awareness of the importance of the Falls. Most recently, the Willamette Falls Legacy Project is working to redevelop the former Blue Heron paper mill site in downtown Oregon City that will include public access to Willamette Falls – the first time in more than 100 years that the public has had this opportunity. Federal designation as a historic area will strengthen the identity of the historic working communities of Oregon City and West Linn by preserving and promoting their distinctive natural, cultural, scenic, recreational, and industrial resources.

This potential heritage area is greatly enhanced by the presence of the Willamette Falls Locks. Completed in 1873, the Locks were the oldest multi-lift navigational locks system in the nation until their closure in 2011. Historically, they served as a gateway for the timber industry to access the mills and the port of Portland. Currently owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the Locks require repairs if they are going to be reopened for operation. However, the lack of tonnage that once utilized the Locks has made it difficult for the USACE to receive appropriations for this purpose. Repairing and reopening the Locks will help to ensure that the Willamette River remains a navigable waterway, and in so doing, restore an economic and transportation resource to the entire Willamette Valley.

Clackamas County is proud to be home to the Willamette Falls and Locks, and we look forward to continuing to partner in efforts to honor and restore these treasures. We urge a “yes” vote on SJM 10.

Please contact Chris Lyons at clyons@clackamas.us for more information.