



WILLAMETTE FALLS HERITAGE AREA COALITION

Regarding SB 256 before the Senate Business and Transportation Committee on February 15, 2017.

The Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition (WFHAC) wishes to go on record as an enthusiastic supporter of SB 256. The WFHAC spearheads one of three major initiatives in the Willamette Falls area: Development of the River Walk in Oregon City and getting the Willamette Falls Navigation Canal and Locks (Locks) reopened being two of the efforts.

The WFHAC Board, made up of 25 government, tribal, private business and non-profit organizations, worked to obtain the state's first Heritage Area designation – the Willamette Falls Heritage Area. We are also in the final stretch of submitting a feasibility study needed to seek national heritage area status from Congress. Having the 143-year-old Locks restored and reopened is a key component of the heritage area goals of preserving heritage sites and promoting heritage tourism as a stimulus for economic development in the communities along 56 river miles of the Willamette. Along with others, the WFHAC has contributed financial support to the effort to bring the Locks back to their original role of uniting what is now two rivers into one Willamette River, that can facilitate commercial and recreational opportunities.

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) wants to transfer the Locks to a local entity because the Locks don't provide the level of national economic benefit required to justify federal investment. The USACE has started a comprehensive Disposition Study intended to be a national pilot for historic USACE properties no longer seeing tonnages that justify federal funding.

Based on the recommendation of the Legislative Task Force convened by former Governor Barbara Roberts, the Willamette Falls Locks Working Group has asked the 2017 Legislative Assembly to form a Willamette Falls Locks Commission. The Commission would work with the USACE to negotiate an agreement on final 'disposition' of the historic facility – hopefully into the hands of a new owner-operator.

If the Locks are repaired and reopened, paddlers on the Willamette River National Water Trail will be able to make the journey from Corvallis to Portland;

companies whose tugs have plied the river for more than a century can move agricultural products and gravel for infrastructure projects down to Portland once again; jet boats and other water craft will carry visitors up to and around the great falls of the Willamette, to take in its beautiful scenery; the Corvallis-to-Portland Regatta will be able once more to tuck its dozens of rowing sculls into the Locks' four narrow chambers; the descendants of the First Peoples of the Willamette area can more easily navigate the river for their ceremonies and annual canoe journey. One can even envision tourist boats (possibly sternwheelers) bringing Portland area conventioners to the heritage sites , environmental wonders, and agricultural showcases (e.g. the Oregon Garden and the Pinot Noir Country) of the Willamette Valley.

The WFHAC supports SB 256 and heartily encourages your committee to endorse it and seek its passage through the Legislative Assembly.