

House Concurrent Resolution 20

Sponsored by Representative WALTERS

SUMMARY

The following summary is not prepared by the sponsors of the measure and is not a part of the body thereof subject to consideration by the Legislative Assembly. It is an editor's brief statement of the essential features of the measure **as introduced**.

Commemorates 150th anniversary of opening of Willamette Falls Locks.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1
2 Whereas the historic Willamette Falls Locks, located on the west bank of the Willamette River
3 in West Linn, were built in the early 1870s by the Willamette Falls Canal and Locks Company (later
4 renamed Portland General Electric) to move river traffic around the 40-foot high horseshoe-shaped
5 basalt ridge between Oregon City and West Linn; and

6 Whereas hundreds of engineers, laborers and stonemasons, under the guidance of chief super-
7 intendent Captain Isaac W. Smith, chief engineer E.G. Tilton and engineering assistant J.A.
8 Lessourd, worked day and night to ensure the successful on-time completion of the project that was
9 so vital to the economy of the region; and

10 Whereas the locks were opened to the public on January 1, 1873, prompting the biggest public
11 celebration in Oregon since it achieved statehood 14 years prior; and

12 Whereas the first vessel to travel through the locks was the steamer Maria Watkins, which
13 entered the first lock at 12:17 p.m. on New Year's Day, 1873, to the elation of spectators lined up
14 along the walls of the locks; and

15 Whereas the locks were the first significant navigational improvement in the United States west
16 of the Rockies, a crucial avenue for transportation of goods throughout the region prior to the
17 construction of the Willamette Falls Railway in 1893, and a boon for the economy of the State of
18 Oregon; and

19 Whereas in 1890, a devastating flood tore through the Willamette Falls, causing serious damage
20 to the locks, flooding the canal with debris and destroying two lock gates, as well as the home of
21 lock tender Jack Chambers; and

22 Whereas in 1899, after a decade of ever worsening structural damage had caused the locks to
23 fall into disrepair and disuse, the United States Army Corps of Engineers began examining the fea-
24 sibility of purchasing the locks from then-owner Portland Railway Light and Power Company in or-
25 der to restore the locks to their former glory; and

26 Whereas in 1912, the War Department approved the \$375,000 purchase of the locks, which was
27 completed in 1915; and

28 Whereas the corps' reconstruction of the canal and locks began in April 1916 under the super-
29 vision of Major H.C. Jewett and assistant engineer E.B. Thomson, and was completed on September
30 1, 1917; and

31 Whereas the locks were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 and desig-
32 nated as an Oregon Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engi-

NOTE: Matter in **boldfaced** type in an amended section is new; matter *[italic and bracketed]* is existing law to be omitted. New sections are in **boldfaced** type.

1 neers in 1991, honoring their critical role in Oregon history; and

2 Whereas in December 2011, after decades in and out of service, the locks were closed, with ex-
3 cessive deterioration leading the corps to reclassify them as nonoperational out of concern for
4 public safety; and

5 Whereas following their reclassification, a groundswell of support for the locks, which included
6 backing by the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners, the Willamette Falls Heritage Founda-
7 tion, the Willamette Falls and Landings Heritage Area Coalition, Portland General Electric, and a
8 host of local politicians, community leaders and citizens of West Linn, Wilsonville, Clackamas
9 County, Metro, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of the
10 Siletz Indians, led Oregon’s Eighty-first Legislative Assembly in 2021 to establish the Willamette
11 Falls Locks Authority, halting the corps’ plans to permanently close and dismantle the locks; and

12 Whereas in June 2022, the Willamette Falls Locks Commission completed an agreement trans-
13 ferring ownership of the locks from the corps to the authority, signaling the beginning of a vibrant
14 new chapter in the story of the historic, long-enduring waterway; and

15 Whereas January 1, 2023, marked the 150th anniversary of the locks’ opening, and they have
16 never been in a better position to be preserved for generations of Oregonians to come; now, there-
17 fore,

18 **Be It Resolved by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon:**

19 That we, the members of the Eighty-second Legislative Assembly, commemorate the 150th anni-
20 versary of the opening of the Willamette Falls Locks and congratulate all who have worked so hard
21 to ensure the longevity of this vital piece of Oregon history; and be it further

22 Resolved, That we encourage all Oregonians to join us in celebrating this significant public
23 milestone.

