

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Focal Areas



Wallowa River Fish Passage and Flow Restoration

Background

The Wallowa River is a large tributary of the Grande Ronde River in Oregon's Snake River Basin. It is home to several native migratory fish species, including Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed spring Chinook salmon, summer steelhead, and bull trout. Coho salmon were recently re-introduced to the Wallowa River basin. The Wallowa River was also once home to Oregon's only Snake River sockeye salmon population, which was extirpated in the early 1900's. Near the headwaters of the Wallowa River, at the foot of the Wallowa Mountains, is Wallowa Lake. A natural glacial lake, it is the centerpiece of Wallowa County's agricultural, natural resources, and tourism economy.

Wallowa Lake Dam, located at the outflow of Wallowa Lake, was constructed in 1916 and rebuilt in 1929 to store water for irrigation. The dam also provides water for the City of Joseph for municipal purposes and provides flood protection for all downstream communities. The dam is currently listed as high hazard, meaning it would likely result in loss of life if it failed. Currently, the dam is limited to storing roughly 70% of the water rights held by the Wallowa Lake Irrigation District. In addition, Wallowa Lake Dam was constructed without fish passage or screening and is a complete barrier to fish moving between Wallowa Lake and the Wallowa River. Several fish passage barriers remain downstream of Wallowa Lake Dam that include unscreened irrigation diversions and water diversion structures that limit upstream passage. If these barriers are not addressed, migrating fish will not be able to access newly constructed passage facilities at Wallowa Lake Dam and will not be able to migrate downstream without being entrained into irrigation fields.



With support from State of Oregon and the state Legislature, efforts are currently underway to rehabilitate Wallowa Lake Dam. Goals of the project include bringing the dam structure to current safety standards, reclaiming storage under existing water rights, and constructing fish passage and screening facilities on the dam. The Wallowa Lake Dam Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was established that makes 5,000 acre-feet (AF) of storage water available for instream flows in both the Wallowa River and select tributaries through voluntary water trades.

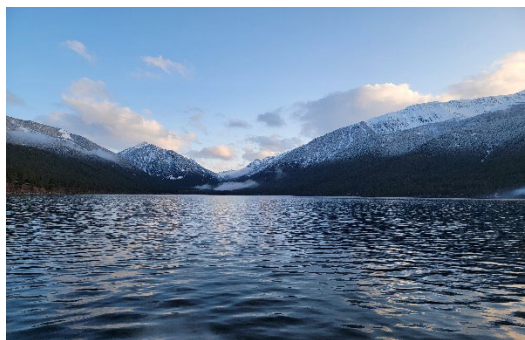


ODFW Implementation Strategies

The goals of the projects within the Wallowa focal area are to provide upstream and downstream passage for migratory fish species in the Wallowa River system, including Wallowa Lake, and upgrade irrigation



infrastructure as needed to accomplish instream flow benefits in the Willowa River and tributaries. With funding opportunities through the State of Oregon and the IIJA, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) is partnering with local stakeholders to provide screening and passage at all remaining barriers in the Willowa River system, and upgrade irrigation infrastructure as needed to implement instream flow benefits described within the MOA.



Within the project area there are nine fish passage barriers currently identified for improvements. In addition, four sites are not currently screened to prevent downstream-migrating fish from being entrained in irrigation diversions. Sites have been prioritized by local ODFW staff and partners, based on the severity of the barrier and location within critical habitat for focal species, and are listed in ODFW's statewide fish passage priority list. In addition to passage barriers, projects include upgrades and repairs to aging irrigation infrastructure in the Willowa River system that will be needed to effectively

convey water for traditional on-farm purposes and for instream flow benefits. Some project examples within the focal area include:

1. Willowa Lake Dam: Rehabilitation efforts would bring the dam to current safety standards, reclaim storage under existing water rights, and provide fish passage and screening.
2. Consolidated Ditch: Provide passage and screening at this large, unscreened irrigation diversion located approximately four miles downstream of Willowa Lake Dam.
3. Irrigation Diversion Barriers: There are five irrigation diversions that create partial barriers to fish passage in the Willowa River that need improved fish passage for all species and upgrades for efficient water use.
4. Cross-Country Canal Headgates: The cross-country canal conveys water between the Willowa River and the lower Lostine River, a flow-limited tributary that hosts ESA-listed spring Chinook, summer steelhead, and bull trout. Automated headgates require repair to route instream flows to Willowa River tributaries.
5. Chamberlain Pipeline: This pipeline routes water to irrigators in the lower Willowa Valley. This aging pipeline has issues with leaks and needs replacement. The pipeline could play a role in delivering instream flows to Willowa River tributaries.

Potential IIJA Funding Opportunities

ODFW is working in partnership with tribes, federal and state agencies, and irrigators to complete projects listed within the Willowa focal area. Programs through the IIJA that are well-aligned with focal area projects include:

- *USFWS National Fish Passage Program* provides \$200 million for fish passage and barrier removal projects.
- *NOAA Restoring Fish Passage through Barrier Removal Grants* provide \$400 million for fish passage by removal of dams and other in-stream barriers for native migratory fish.
- *NFWF American the Beautiful Challenge* includes IIJA funds from the DOI, USFS, and USDOD totaling approximately \$85 million a year for projects that connect and restore lands, waters, and wildlife.

Keep checking ODFW's IIJA website for updated information (<https://dfw.state.or.us/IIJA/>)

