



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This agenda item requests Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission approval of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's 2025 Statewide Fish Passage Barrier Priority List.

Fish passage is a critical component of many aspects of fishery resource management. Connectivity between aquatic habitats is an integral component of healthy fish populations. Without habitat connectivity, Oregon's 38 species of native migratory fish (NMF) become fragmented across the landscape. This can result in population isolation, increased exposure to disturbance, diminished reproductive potential, and often results in declining population size and diminished recovery potential.

Fish passage barriers are prevalent throughout the Oregon landscape. Over time, despite historic fish passage rules and regulations, access to native fish habitats has been blocked or impaired by the construction of impassable artificial obstructions (barriers) such as culverts, dams, tide gates, dikes, water diversions, and other man-made infrastructure. Providing passage at these artificial obstructions is vital to conserving and recovering Oregon's NMF populations. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) latest inventory identifies 41,839 artificial obstructions to fish passage in the State of Oregon.

Identification of priority fish passage barriers is a critical component of ODFW's Fish Screening and Passage Program (FSPP), which focuses on restoring passage to meet the needs of Oregon's NMF. A statewide inventory of priority fish passage artificial obstructions is required in Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 509.585(3) and Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) 635-412-0015(1). This rule states that ODFW shall "establish a list of priority artificial obstructions at which fish passage would provide the greatest benefit to NMF for restoration and enforcement purposes." Furthermore, the statutes state that the priority project list shall be subject to periodic review and amendment by the department and to formal review and amendment by the commission no less frequently than once every five years.

The previous Statewide Fish Passage Barrier Priority List (Priority List) was approved by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in 2019 (Attachment 2). Previous priority lists approved by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in 2013 and 2019 were developed by ODFW staff identifying priority artificial obstructions and using a scoring methodology to rank them. To develop the 2025 Priority List, ODFW built on the foundation of the previous lists and updated the scoring equation with two new components to address the climate change factor added to rule in 2023 (Attachment 3).

Climate change presents significant challenges for NMF populations, affecting habitat availability and quality, which can increase competition and strain to vulnerable NMF species. In response to these needs, the 2025 Priority List incorporates new scoring factors that account for current access to cold water and areas resilient to climate change. This allows ODFW to better target restoration efforts that enhance resilience in fish populations and their habitats. Using these methods, ODFW has constructed a list of 611 ranked priority fish passage barriers to identify locations that would maximize the return of NMF to critical habitats if passage were

provided (Attachment 4). Of the 582 barriers that were on the previous 2019 priority list, 85 have been addressed, improving access to over approximately 1,460 miles of NMF habitat, averaged by species.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

ODFW developed a publicly accessible website for outreach efforts during the Priority List update. All information regarding the update can be found at: <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/passage/inventories.asp>. The final list will be published on this site, which will continue to be maintained and updated with information including a Frequently Asked Question document and any additional outreach information developed to identify and assist owners and operators of high priority fish passage barriers.

ODFW held three public comment periods to aid the Priority List update. Open comment solicitation periods were held from July 5-3, 2023, November 7-28, 2024, and February 7-28, 2025. Fourteen public comments were received during these periods and were presented to the Fish Passage Task Force (FPTF); all comments are included in Attachment 5.

In addition to the public comment periods, the Priority List update was vetted through the FPTF. The FPTF is comprised of nine volunteer members, appointed by the ODFW Director, who represent interests subject to the installation of fish passage facilities (also referred to as “water users” as a generic term), Fishing and Conservation, and Public-At-Large constituencies. The FPTF makes recommendations to the department and advises ODFW on rulemaking, funding, waivers, exemptions, and fish passage prioritization. The FPTF played a vital role in the development of the 2025 Priority List. The FPTF provided input and received periodic updates during their regularly held public meetings on October 13, 2023, February 9, 2024, May 17, 2024, October 4, 2024, and December 6, 2024. There were additional opportunities for public comment during each of these public meetings.

Additionally, a subset of the FPTF volunteered to be part of a workgroup that provided a more focused review and advised ODFW on the updated scoring methodology, including the addition of the two new climate change variables mentioned above. The workgroup had four meetings on December 12, 2023, January 25, 2024, March 19, 2024 and the final workgroup meeting was held over two days on September 17 and 19, 2024.

The Priority List update and outreach efforts resulted in public interest that was reflected by the publication of at least two news articles. These include:

1. For salmon, an ancient journey turned deadly

<https://www.courthousenews.com/for-salmon-an-ancient-journey-turned-deadly/>

and

2. Oregon Issues for Comment Draft Priority List Of 605 Most Critical Manmade Barriers to Fish Passage, Climate Change Used for Rankings

<https://columbiabasinbulletin.org/oregon-issues-for-comment-draft-priority-list-of-605-most-critical-manmade-barriers-to-fish-passage-climate-change-used-for-rankings/>

The final draft list was presented to the FPTF at their March 7, 2025, meeting for review and recommendation. During that public meeting the FPTF unanimously approved (7-0) a motion to recommend that the Commission adopt the draft 2025 Statewide Fish Passage Barrier Priority List (two Task Force members were not present).

ISSUE 1 Approval of the 2025 Statewide Fish Passage Barrier Priority List

ANALYSIS

With the creation of the 2025 Fish Passage Priority Barrier List, the intent was to build upon the successes of the 2013 and 2019 priority list by creating a more comprehensive priority list that represents the numerous fish passage issues in the State. The primary goal of this process was to develop a list based on the biological needs of NMF. ODFW accomplished this by identifying the highest priority barriers within each ODFW District across the State. ODFW then scored each artificial obstruction based on a standardized method with factors relative to each barrier.

Consistent with OAR 635-412-0015, staff used the information available at each barrier to inform the inputs to the prioritization equation based on the needs of NMF. This prioritization equation used the following factors: “habitat quantity” upstream of the barrier, “habitat quality” upstream of the barrier, current “level of passage” provided, “species present” at the obstruction, “biological status” (# of NMF species present and their listing under the federal Endangered Species Act) of species present, and other unique or limiting factors provided by ODFW District Fish Biologists (“auto ups” or “auto downs”) to calculate a barrier’s priority score. The scoring methodology was updated this year to include two new factors to account for climate change. These new factors include: “cold water access” and “change in thermal suitability”. These factors will only add points to the barrier’s final score.

The methodology and information used to develop the list are described in Attachment 3 and are consistent with the requirements of ORS 509.585 and OAR 635-412-0015. To account for the similarity in final scores within the data and prioritization methodology, the final 2025 Statewide Fish Passage Priority List utilized a K-means cluster analysis to aggregate priorities into similar groups rather than a numerical ranking for each barrier. The final priority list contains 611 high priority fish passage barriers (Attachment 4). **It is important to note that all barriers on the list are high priorities for ODFW.**

OPTIONS

1. Approve the 2025 Statewide Fish Passage Priority Barrier List as presented and direct department staff to continue working cooperatively with owners of artificial obstructions on the priority list to provide fish passage.
2. Revise and then approve the 2025 Statewide Fish Passage Priority Barrier List and direct department staff to continue working cooperatively with owners of artificial obstructions on the priority list to provide fish passage.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: ISSUE 1

1. Option 1: Approve the 2025 Statewide Fish Passage Priority Barrier List as presented.

DRAFT MOTION:

“I move to approve the 2025 Statewide Fish Passage Priority Barrier List as presented, and direct department staff to continue working cooperatively with owners of artificial obstructions on the priority list to provide fish passage.”

Effective Date: Date here or *Upon Filing*