



OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
Joint Fish Screens & Passage Task Force

MEETING MINUTES

Lake County Courthouse, Lakeview, OR
Conference Room

Thursday – May 29, 2025 @ 0800 to ~1200 hrs.

Members	Representing	Present In Person	Present Virtually	Absent
Fish Passage Task Force				
Kelly Moore	Fishing and Conservation		x	
Denise Hoffert	Fishing and Conservation		x	
Terry Turner (<i>Chair</i>)	Fishing and Conservation		x	
Steve Albertelli	Water Users	x		
April Snell	Water Users			x
Fred Messerle	Water Users	x		
Zak Toledo	Public-At-Large		x	
Ted Labbe	Public-At-Large		x	
Tom Iverson	Public-At-Large	x		
Fish Screening Task Force				
Darin Olson	Agriculture		x	
Robert Durham	Agriculture	x		
Kristin Bishop	Fishing or Fish Conservation			x
Judith Barkstedt	Fishing or Fish Conservation			x
William Freeland	Fishing or Fish Conservation	x		
Alexis Vaivoda	Public-At-Large	x		

ODFW Staff in Attendance:

Mac Barr, Fish Passage Coordinator
 Katherine Nordholm, Fish Screen and Passage Coordinator
 Sharon Crowley, Assistant Fish Passage Coordinator
 Kevin Rybacki, ODFW-ODOT Assistant Liaison
 Justin Miles, Klamath Watershed Assistant District Fish Biologist (Lakeview)
 Philip Milburn, Klamath/Malheur Watershed Manager
 Greg Apke*, Fish Screens and Passage Program Manager
 Kevin Stertz*, North Willamette Watershed District Fish Biologist
 Benji Ramirez*, Klamath Watershed District Fish Biologist
 Tom Murtagh*, North Willamette Watershed District Assistant Fish Biologist
 Tom Stahl*, Deputy Administrator, Inland Fish

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Madelyn Antinucci, Community member
 Allen Gillette*, ODOT
 Meghan Thompson*, ODOT
 Joshua Hanson*, ODF
 Melanie Gualotunia, City of Portland
 Jason Tosch, Stoller Wine
 Jeremy Person, City of Portland

*Attended virtually, *additional members of the public may have joined virtually throughout the meeting.*

Meeting Agenda

Call to Order Fish Passage and Fish Screening Task Force Meeting

Introductions and Chair Turner called the meeting to order at 8:00 am.

Review & Approve Agenda & March 7, 2025 Fish Passage Task Force Meeting Minutes and March 7, 2025 Fish Screening Task Force Meeting Minutes

Motion: Durham moved to approve the Fish Screening Task Force minutes. Olson seconded the motion. The Fish Screening Task Force voted to approve. All four members in attendance voted to approve. Motion passed.

Motion: Albertelli moved to approve the Fish Passage Task Force minutes. Messerle seconded the motion. The Fish Passage Task Force voted to approve. All seven members in attendance voted to approve. Motion passed.

ODFW Passage Program Updates (*Barr*)

Mac Barr provided several program updates, beginning with the adoption of the 2025 Statewide Fish Passage Priority List by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission on April 18th. Barr thanked Katherine Nordholm for her contributions and acknowledged Fish Passage Task Force members who participated in the process. Another recent accomplishment was the publication of the guidance document and application materials for beaver coexistence devices, now available on the Fish Passage website. Barr shared examples of coexistence tools such as pond levelers and beaver exclusion fencing. Barr provided an update on the request for proposals for the \$11 million in fish passage funding available through lottery bonds and ODOT fish passage restoration funds. He distributed a handout summarizing project proposals in the chat, noting that 42 applications were received, with more funds requested than available to distribute. Those funding decisions and applicant notifications are expected soon. Barr also provided an update on potential changes to the Pacific Coastal Salmon Restoration Fund (PCSRF), which is critical to ODFW's Screens and Passage Programs. Supporting materials were made available both in person and online. Tom Iverson added that PCSRF—covering Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Alaska, and the four Columbia River Tribes—is currently funded at approximately \$70 million. However, the administration's current proposal to NOAA suggests eliminating the fund entirely. While the FY25 budget remains uncertain, initial figures are below the continuing resolution levels, raising significant concern for FY26. Finally, Barr announced two open positions—one on each task force—with public recruitments expected to open the following week.

ODFW Screens Program Updates (*Nordholm*)

Katherine Nordholm gave an update on the ODFW Screens Program. She presented the four ODFW screen shops and their corresponding geographic service areas. She provided an overview of the Screens Program's funding sources, including the angling license surcharge, General Fund, Pacific Coastal Salmon Restoration Fund (PCSRF), and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). She clarified that PCSRF supports work with anadromous fish and BPA funds are designated for the Columbia Basin; therefore, in regions like Lakeview in the Great Basin, where anadromy is absent, available funding is limited to angling and general funds. Nordholm also provided additional details about various funding contracts and acknowledged contributions from NGOs, federal and tribal partners, drought funds, the American Rescue Plan Act, and lottery bonds. Nordholm described key components of program implementation, including the agency's cost share program, fish screens tax credit, technical assistance, and inspection certifications. She presented graphics illustrating trends in project types over time and highlighted several local screen projects. She emphasized the growing need for screen maintenance, supported by data showing an increase in maintenance activity. Looking ahead, she discussed several initiatives including a pilot project, new exemption guidance for the Screens Task Force, prioritization of unscreened diversions, and the development of a fish screening certification website. Nordholm concluded by noting ongoing challenges for the Screen Program, such as staffing limitations, funding constraints, permitting complexities, and the growing demands of maintenance and project tracking.

Task Force Member Issues, Updates & Roundtable (*All*)

Task force members shared updates related to their areas of representation.

- Tom Iverson highlighted challenges stemming from lack of engagement with the federal government following a change in administration, despite signing the Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement in 2024. He noted that funding for salmon restoration is uncertain, with FY25 budgets not visible and serious concern for FY26. Iverson noted a significant loss of federal staff due to forced retirements, affecting NOAA,

USFWS, and EPA, leading to diminished institutional knowledge and morale. He emphasized that even if funding returns, lack of capacity may limit operations. Iverson also discussed halted grant funding, efforts to reframe messaging around economic benefits of restoration, and difficulty reestablishing relationships with federal contacts. He also noted BPA budget cuts despite being funded by ratepayers, and that current re-hires are focused on energy reliability, not fish protection.

- Robert Durham discussed Fifteen Mile Basin long-standing screen projects (25–30 years old) in the needing ongoing maintenance and replacement. Some of the projects include rotary screen rebuilds and fencing. He expressed concern over funding for voluntary irrigation shut-off programs and federal grant uncertainty. Durham praised collaboration with Wasco County and local farmers looking for funding opportunities. He hopes for favorable summer conditions continue with lingering snowpack and no heat spikes to date.
- Fred Messerle echoed federal funding concerns. He shared his frustration over ODFW's email to get requests in for ditch cleaning and how the process excludes water containing salmon or that completely dry out, which subsequently precludes the Oregon Coast and leaves landowners no mechanism to deal with their maintenance issues. Messerle cited federal staffing shortages whereas there is only one ACOE staff in Eugene and one NMFS staff in Roseburg, leaving no capacity for permitting processes. He noted work on the coast is being done through watershed councils that depend on indirect to survive, and because OWEB can't support indirect above 15% and it takes upwards of 20% to run a project, the result on the ground is operating without compliance oversight, making a comparison to the "Wild West." He positively highlighted the passage of Senate Bill 221 for hatch box programs in the Coos and Coquille basins and praised the Coquille Tribe and ODFW for their role in the process. Lastly, he noted the challenges with beaver management in low gradient, tidally influenced coastal zones.
- Steve Albertelli reported that the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council had secured grant funding for the design phase of Mirror Pond fish passage.
- William Freeland shared observations of local watershed council activity, including fire reduction efforts in the Long Tom Watershed, floodplain restoration, steelhead habitat enhancement and the removal of Sodom Dam in the Calapooia, restoration of the lower portions of Deer Creek after the Holiday Farm Fire, and the ongoing work on the South Fork McKenzie in the McKenzie Watershed. The Middle Fork Willamette had some floodplain restoration and were working on ideas at Island Park Slough. The Coast Fork Willamette has nine active projects focused on riparian restoration and noxious weed removal.
- Alexis Vaivoda reported extremely dry spring conditions in the Hood River Basin. She shared concerns over their new purchase agreement that begins January 1st and the upcoming rate change that will halve available funds for projects. Vaivoda cited reduced engagement from federal agencies due to staff losses and the resulting strain on communications, partnerships and the ability to keep projects moving forward. She also stated that there is the potential loss of state funding if federal support falls through and emphasized the backlog of screening projects needing attention in her and surrounding districts.
- Zak Toledo congratulated the Fish Passage Program and Katherine Nordholm on incorporating climate and thermal resilience into the statewide priority list. He highlighted problems with halted Building Resilient Infrastructure In Communities (BRIC) grants through FEMA, using the example of a seismic upgrade to a hospital in Warrenton that was paused mid-construction, despite millions of dollars that have already been invested.
- Denise Hoffert clarified that while OWEB's indirect cost limit is 15%, organizations with a federally negotiated NICRA rate [Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement] may use the higher rate. She noted that many OWEB-funded groups have pursued this. Hoffert shared the timeline for the next Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) opportunity, which is opening January 2026, with applications due in the fall 2026, awards decided January 2027, and funding available in July 2027. She also informed the Task Forces that public input on ecological priorities for the FIP is still being accepted.
- Ted Labbe reported that Curry Watersheds Partnership and Wild Rivers Conservancy applied for ODFW grants for the Bagley Creek Fish Passage Restoration project, which addresses multiple barriers to historic Coho habitat in the Elk River watershed. That coincides with an EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant regarding soil contamination around the old plywood mill. Labbe's organization, Depave, is also affected by federal funding uncertainty. He coordinated with Katherine Nordholm to present the priority list to a metro-area multi-agency group and although he wasn't able to attend, it was well received.
- Terry Turner reported that his chapter was awarded a \$364,000 Private Forest Accord grant for helicopter log placements on Upper Cub Creek. The project follows previous work on Cub and Berry Creeks. Statewide, Trout Unlimited has a \$14 million restoration and fish passage budget for this year, but next

year's federal outlook is unclear despite signed agreements. Their DC-based staff are actively working to restore federal support.

- Kelly Moore shared some positive news by reporting the results of an ODFW study showing increasing public support for marine reserves each year. He highlighted the importance of these marine reserves for various species.
- Benji Ramirez, ODFW Klamath District Fish Biologist, reported promising signs following Klamath River dam removals. A healthy run of fall Chinook spawned in the Oregon portion of the basin, including the mainstem and Spencer Creek. Crews recently captured juvenile Chinook, confirming successful reproduction in areas previously impounded by the JC Boyle Reservoir.
- Darrin Olson did not have any updates.

Public Comment Period

- No public comments were received outside of comments for the exemptions, displayed during appropriate exemption review.

Updates on the SFISH Program from ODF (Oregon Dept. of Forestry) (Hanson)

Josh Hanson, the Small Forestland Investment in Stream Habitat (SFISH) Coordinator with the Oregon Department of Forestry, provided an overview of the SFISH program, which was established through the Private Forest Accord, a policy to revise forest practices. SFISH provides grants to small forestland owners to improve fish habitat by removing or replacing fish barriers at road-stream crossings and remediating unstable road segments near fish-bearing streams. The program aims to benefit fish species covered by ODF's Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), expand the program reach through coordinated outreach, build a strong landowner resource network, and diversify funding to support all eligible projects. To date, 16 projects have been funded at an estimated \$4.2 million, addressing 27 barriers and improving access to 56 miles of habitat for five fish species, including Oregon Coast Coho and Cutthroat Trout. Of the 62 total eligible projects, 46 remain unfunded, representing a \$15–20 million funding gap. In response to a question from Greg Apke regarding prioritization and performance metrics, Hanson explained that while there are no formal targets for miles of habitat opened or projects completed, the program does track miles of improved habitat and project costs. The overarching goal is to fund \$10 million in on-the-ground work, though available funding currently falls short of that target. He noted that prioritization is similar to ODFW's approach, considering factors like habitat length and quality, number and status of species affected, and site benefits. Project review is conducted by a five-member team, including representatives from the Task Force, the ODS Committee for Forest Lands, ODFW, ODF, and an NGO. In response to a question from Terry, it was confirmed that Dean Finnerty from Trout Unlimited was on the committee last year and Mac confirmed that Ted Labbe will serve as the Task Force representative in the upcoming review.

ODFW Exemption Reviews for 2025 (Rybacki)

Kevin Rybacki provided an update on the 2025 exemption review process. Under Oregon Revised Statutes, artificial obstructions that have been granted an exemption from fish passage requirements—based on the determination that providing passage would result in no appreciable benefit to native migratory fish—must be reviewed every seven years to assess whether conditions have changed. These reviews are conducted by local district fish biologists who have expertise in both regional landscapes and the fish populations present. In 2025, eight exemptions were reviewed, and all were found to have unchanged conditions, resulting in exemption renewals. Rybacki shared a map showing exemption locations along with additional site information and informed the Task Forces that a web map is available through a link on ODFW's Fish Passage website. Zach Toledo emphasized the importance of publicly reporting on exemption reviews and maintaining transparency in the process. Fred Messerle asked whether any past reviews had led to a change in exemption status and Greg Apke responded that, to date, no exemptions have been revoked due to changing site conditions. Katherine Nordholm added that while there was one site where an artificial obstruction, a culvert, had been removed, that action led to the site being naturally passable and thus no longer subject to exemption review. Rybacki added that the habitat conditions themselves had not prompted a revocation. Additional suggestions by the group were made to include present photos of the exemption sites and to add obstruction type to future exemption summary tables.

Keno Dam Fish Passage and Klamath River Screening Projects & Funding (Milburn)

-Philip Milburn provided an update on restoration efforts in the Klamath Basin, noting that although removal of four hydroelectric dams has reopened 400 miles of habitat, habitat quality and accessibility remain concerns. ODFW has prioritized the basin for restoration funding under the JOBS Act and Inflation Reduction Act, targeting

screening, passage, and aquatic and riparian habitat restoration. Challenges include limited resources, concerns about potential removal of Keno and Link River dams, and lack of BPA and PCSRF funds, leaving state funds as the primary source for passage and screening projects. Milburn explained that after 400 years of impoundment, anadromous fish will need to adapt to new life histories and navigate ongoing obstacles. This has created a great opportunity for ODFW to advance restoration efforts in the basin. Through NOAA, ODFW received \$1.9 million over three years for scoping and feasibility studies for fish passage alternatives at Keno Dam, where the existing fish ladder does not meet state or federal standards. Sideboards include that the resolution provides passage of flood flow and can maintain water level in the Keno reach. Options under consideration include dam removal and replacement or fish ladder replacement with gate modifications to improve passage while maintaining flood flow and water levels in the Keno reach. Keno Dam's high flows inundate agricultural lands and create important wetland marsh habitat for migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway. A \$4.5 million Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Ecosystem Restoration Program grant that supports design and repairs to the existing fish ladder based on a 2023 inspection, while a separate \$6 million BOR grant funds screening projects across the Klamath Basin. Screening efforts include screen installations at priority diversions, evaluating fish protection technologies for larger diversions, and conducting landowner outreach for the area where Klamath Project operates, specifically between Link River Dam and the Oregon-California state border. Milburn stated that ODFW has developed a process of how to prioritize screening needs in the area through the Klamath Reservoir Restoration Prioritization Plan, which identifies, evaluates and assesses needs based on impacts to fish and a feasibility score that includes the willingness of landowners. Discussion on the presentation highlighted some of the funding uncertainties, including the degree of user group and irrigation districts' involvement, and the scale of need for the screening in the basin. Greg Apke emphasized ODFW's strategy to maximize benefits from available resources and coordination with user groups. Answering these questions with specificity is tough due to the uncertainties and because it is early in the process. Another challenge specific to the Klamath Basin includes screening for endangered juvenile suckers (*Catostomus spp*), whose smaller size complicates the effectiveness of screens. These fish can also benefit from some of the habitat, even if its not ideal quality, in irrigation ditches making screening decisions more complicated. April Snell stressed the importance of strategic collaboration and awareness of water-use sensitivities unique to each irrigation district. She is preparing testimony for the Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act, a multi-state grant program struggling to secure federal support and emphasizing community and irrigator engagement to build project support.

Stoller Reservoir Fish Passage Exemption Request (Barr)

Mac Barr presented the fish passage exemption application from Red Hill Farms LLC to expand the existing Stoller Reservoir, an unnamed reservoir tributary to the Yamhill River. The original reservoir received a fish passage exemption in 2004. The current review was triggered by a fundamental change in permit status due to the application to expand the reservoir's holding capacity with the Oregon Water Resources Department. ODFW conducted site analyses in April and May 2025 to evaluate whether providing fish passage at the artificial obstruction would result in any appreciable benefit to fish. The proposal seeks to double the reservoir's capacity from 30 to 60 acre-feet without altering the dam structure. The unnamed tributary is a perennial stream flowing through agricultural land downstream of the project and is considered historical Coastal Cutthroat Trout habitat used primarily for foraging and overwintering, with spawning substrate is classified as poor. Upstream conditions include a lack of defined channel as the stream passes through drainage tiles under a vineyard and through a drainage ditch with seasonal flows from the headwaters. Downstream, the stream is heavily modified by agriculture, straightened, overgrown with blackberries, and contains seven artificial obstructions, including two full barriers to fish passage. ODFW North Willamette Watershed District Fish Biologist Kevin Stertz confirmed there is no appreciable benefit to providing fish passage at the site and that conditions and species composition are highly unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

- Written public comments submitted by Chuck Erickson on 5/5/2025:
 - “If the conditions change in the future, exemptions can be revoked, and fish passage will be addressed.” How many times have we read this statement? Does this encourage or discourage recovering this public waterway for the benefit of fish? When are we going to set a date to fix this river and quit kicking the can down the road for our children and grandchildren? “If things change” is a cop out. Where's the magic wand?
Requiring fish passage is the perfect starting point for change to begin. Last I heard Oregon fisheries are not doing so well and this kind of effort from ODFW is a great example why. ODFW job is fish and wildlife and should be working every angle to restore our rivers for future generation. Please stop passing out no fish cards to the ranch and farm team. We are paying ODFW to protect and enhance our resources, instead we get zero for this river system. Who

wrecked the river in the first place, was it ranch and farm team or fishermen? We waited long enough I have seen this same BS over and over for this river. Sad indictment for ODFW work protecting and enhancing problem rivers for fish.

- Written public comment from Gary G. on 5/7/2025:
 - “If there is any possibility of preventing [providing] fish passage this exemption should be denied, with the declining fish runs and loss of habitat in Oregon everything possible should be done to protect this fragile resource.”
- Written public comment from Kathleen Meyer on 5/15/2025
 - “I am a retired Environmental Specialist that lives in Douglas County, By enlarging the pool size of any reservoir 2 important environmental things that affect aquatic species will happen; 1 The increased pool size will raise water temperature in the reservoir and any flow downstream. 2 The increased water temperature in the reservoir and pool size may lead to higher algae level (depending on reservoir depth) that can deplete oxygen levels. There are only two [of the] many factors that have contributed to the problems with dams and aquatic species that in some cases have led to the removal of the dam! Food for thought!”
 - Mac Barr noted that the existing reservoir uses aerators ratioed to its size that adds dissolved oxygen and circulates the water to help assuage these concerns.

Chair Terry Turner called for a motion to approve the exemption as presented. Ted Labbe agreed with the exemption requests as presented but wanted to comment that even small, intermittent headwater streams have ecological benefits and fish use, countering some common public assumptions. Zak Toledo moved to renew the exemption, with Steve Albertelli seconding the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Chair Turner acknowledged the importance of the discussion about ephemeral streams but emphasized the need for pragmatism, advising against spending resources on fish passage where benefits are minimal or nonexistent.

Vermont Creek Culvert Fish Passage Exemption Request (Barr)

Mac Barr presented fish passage exemption application from the Portland Bureau of Environmental Services to repair a failed culvert on Vermont Creek, a tributary to Fanno Creek, where it crosses under SW 45th Avenue in Southwest Portland. ODFW conducted habitat and passage analyses in September 2024 and April 2025 to determine if providing fish passage would offer any appreciable benefit. Vermont Creek is a small intermittent urban stream characterized by episodic rain and stormwater surges, with no flow during summer and a median flow of 0.05 cubic feet per second at the project site. The creek is considered to be historic habitat for Coastal Cutthroat Trout and potentially habitat for Brook Lamprey and Winter Steelhead near its confluence with Fanno Creek. The fish passage trigger resulted from the proposed culvert repair, involving a cured-in-place pipe liner, defined as construction under Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs). Habitat conditions are poor, with limited flow depth and duration, and the creek is classified as impaired by the Department of Environmental Quality due to elevated levels of zinc, E. coli, mercury, and high temperatures. There are two fish passage barriers upstream and two downstream from the project site, and no fish were observed during assessments.

ODFW North Willamette Watershed District Fish Biologist Kevin Stertz states that the factors impacting habitat function in upper Vermont Creek cannot be fixed or reduced in the foreseeable future and the absence of fish in the 100-meter reach downstream and 150-meter reach upstream of the culvert, no appreciable benefit would result from providing passage and therefore, ODFW district supports and recommends approval of the exemption request.

- Chuck Erickson and Gary G. submitted the above comments for both exemption applications.

Terry Turner emphasized the need for pragmatic assessments and called for a motion to approve the exemption. Fred Messerle motioned, and Kelly Moore seconded the approval. The motion carried unanimously. Greg Apke commended staff for their extensive efforts on exemptions, noting that there are many more projects the Task Force does not see due to staff working with applicants to either provide passage or seek waivers. Kelly Moore shared an anecdote about relocating a healthy adult cutthroat trout downstream from an isolated pool in an unnamed tributary of Mountain View Creek, illustrating the resiliency of the species.

Lake County Fish Passage and Screening unique challenges and successes (Miles)

Justin Miles, Assistant Klamath District Fish Biologist, presented on the distinct challenges and successes related to fish passage and screening in the Klamath Basin’s Lake County. The region, part of the Great Basin, lacks anadromous fish and includes watersheds shared with California and Nevada. Despite its large area, Lake County has a small, aging population whose economy is primarily based on ranching, hay production, and timber harvesting. The fish community includes species such as Redband Trout, Goose Lake and Warner Suckers, Tui

Chub, Speckled Dace, Pit Klamath Brook and Good Lake Lamprey, Pit Sculpin, and Northern (Pit) Roach. Key challenges for fish passage include winter ice damage to screens and structures, high-flow events with large rocks and boulders, communicating the importance of passage to landowners, particularly on creeks that run dry in the summer, rising project costs, and accommodating diverse species and life histories. Miles highlighted several local passage projects, including those on Elder Creek, Drews Creek, Twentymile Creek, Chewaucan River, Honey Creek, and Deep Creek. He also discussed the Southern Oregon-Northeastern California (SONEC) region, emphasizing its role as critical feeding and breeding habitat for migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway and the relationship between flood irrigation practices and the creation of marshes that mimic historic conditions in the region. Fish screening challenges include managing seasonal extremes in water levels, winter ice requiring screen removal and reinstallation, interactions with beavers, maintenance demands, and finding effective solutions for these variable conditions. Many of the sites demonstrated were visited by the Task Forces during the field portions of the Joint Fish Passage and Screens Task Force Meeting.