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Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

News Release

October 21, 2014

ODOT, ODFW agree on plan to repair failing highway culverts, improve fish passage

SALEM, Ore. – Oregon taxpayers and native fish will both benefit under a new culvert repair pilot program agreed upon by the Oregon departments of Transportation and Fish and Wildlife, and recently approved by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.

The three-year pilot program will make it easier for ODOT to make short-term repairs to culverts within its highway system. In return for including site-specific improvements in fish passage at each site, ODOT will receive a temporary reprieve from the state's fish passage requirements that often involve more extensive repairs to provide full passage to native migratory fish.

"Typically meeting passage requirements has meant replacing a deteriorating culvert with a bridge," said John Raasch, ODOT Environmental Resources Unit manager. "This program will allow ODOT to spend \$20,000 to repair a culvert instead of \$4 million to replace it with a bridge or larger culvert to match the natural stream width."

The costs savings realized under this program will allow ODOT to stretch limited transportation dollars to temporarily repair more culverts in poor or critical condition, Raasch added.

Under the agreement, fish passage at all culvert repair sites must be improved. In addition, ODOT will pay \$1.8 million into an ODFW-managed account to fund statewide high-priority fish passage projects, according to Greg Apke, ODFW Fish Passage Program leader.

ODOT will also fund a new transportation liaison within ODFW who will help administer and evaluate the repair program and identify which culvert sites can be covered by the agreement. The liaison will be on-site to help identify what upgrades can be included to help improve fish passage and watershed health.

According to Ed Bowles, ODFW Fish Division administrator, the agreement is a testament to what can happen when two agencies share a commitment to watershed health, fish passage, infrastructure maintenance and public safety.

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