NEWS FROM NOAA
NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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FIRST PROJECT COMPLETED UNDER NOAA OPEN RIVERS INITIATIVE

What should be done with relic dams that no longer serve their intended purpose, block passage of migratory fish, and pose a hazard to the community? The people of Brownsville, Oregon, faced that question and decided that it was time for their dam to go.

The dam will be breached on Aug. 27, following a ceremony with speakers from NOAA, the state of Oregon, and the local community. This event will mark the removal of the last upstream barrier on the Calapooia River. The remaining downstream barrier is slated to be removed as well. The completion of these two projects will allow winter steelhead salmon and spring chinook salmon access to nearly 40 miles of historic upstream spawning and rearing habitat.

"The removal of the Brownsville dam is exactly the type of project that the Open Rivers Initiative is designed to assist," said retired Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "It provides community benefits, restores a river ecosystem and demonstrates what can happen when people come together to address shared challenges."

This dam removal is the first project to be completed under NOAA's new Open Rivers Initiative, which provides funding and technical expertise for community-driven, small dam and river barrier removals. Under the initiative, NOAA will work with communities to remove up to 50 obsolete dams and rundown culverts across the nation each year. These projects will begin to repair river systems and also eliminate dangerous conditions that are prevalent at outdated structures. Today, more than 3,500 large dams in the U.S. are considered unsafe, and thousands of smaller dams are also susceptible to leaking, buckling, and failure, placing nearby communities at risk.

Currently, the 10-foot high Brownsville dam creates an area for swimming, and has helped maintain a modest flow of water through a canal that winds through the small town. However, the mill that the dam used to power is long gone, and the dam blocks salmon from reaching their historic spawning grounds. The Calapooia Watershed Council was able to gain community support for removing the dam by ensuring that water would continue to flow through the canal with the installation of a small pump. The canal has been a centerpiece for Brownsville and provides irrigation water to several local citizens.

The project is funded through grants from NOAA, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Bella Vista Foundation.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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