



New strategy will guide fish passage improvements



In 2014, 2SHB 2251 created the Fish Passage Barrier Removal Board to create a statewide strategy for fish barrier removal to maximize the state's investment.

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In recent decades, state agencies, local governments, non-profit groups, tribes and others have worked to remove culverts that present a barrier to steelhead and salmon in streams throughout the state. Since 1999, the timber industry has also restored thousands of miles of spawning and rearing habitat under the terms of Washington's Forest and Fish Law.

Government agencies and private landowners have independently made substantial progress in fish barrier removal; but in many cases, fish passage remains blocked elsewhere in the system. Coordinating the removal of fish barriers within a watershed can help build on the investment that has been made by many parties to improve access to fish habitat.

In 2014, the Washington State Legislature created the Fish Passage Barrier Removal Board to identify and expedite the removal of fish barriers and create a coordinated statewide approach for fish barrier removal to maximize investments. That strategy is especially important as lawmakers determine how to meet the cost of a 2013 court decision requiring the state to correct up to 900 additional fish barriers on state lands.

Coordinated approach focuses on key goals

2SHB 2251, approved last year, created the Fish Passage Barrier Removal Board to establish a new strategy for fish barrier removal and administer grant funding available for that purpose. The legislation established several key objectives for the new strategy including:

- Coordination with all relevant state agencies and local governments to maximize state investments in removing fish barriers.
- Realizing economies of scale by bundling projects whenever possible.
- Streamlining the permitting process whenever possible without compromising public safety and accountability.

Chaired by Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW), the board includes representatives of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Department of Natural Resources, Tribes, city and county governments and the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office. In developing the statewide strategy, the board has been working closely with salmon recovery organizations and expects to approve statewide guidelines by July 2015.

Local governments and private landowners

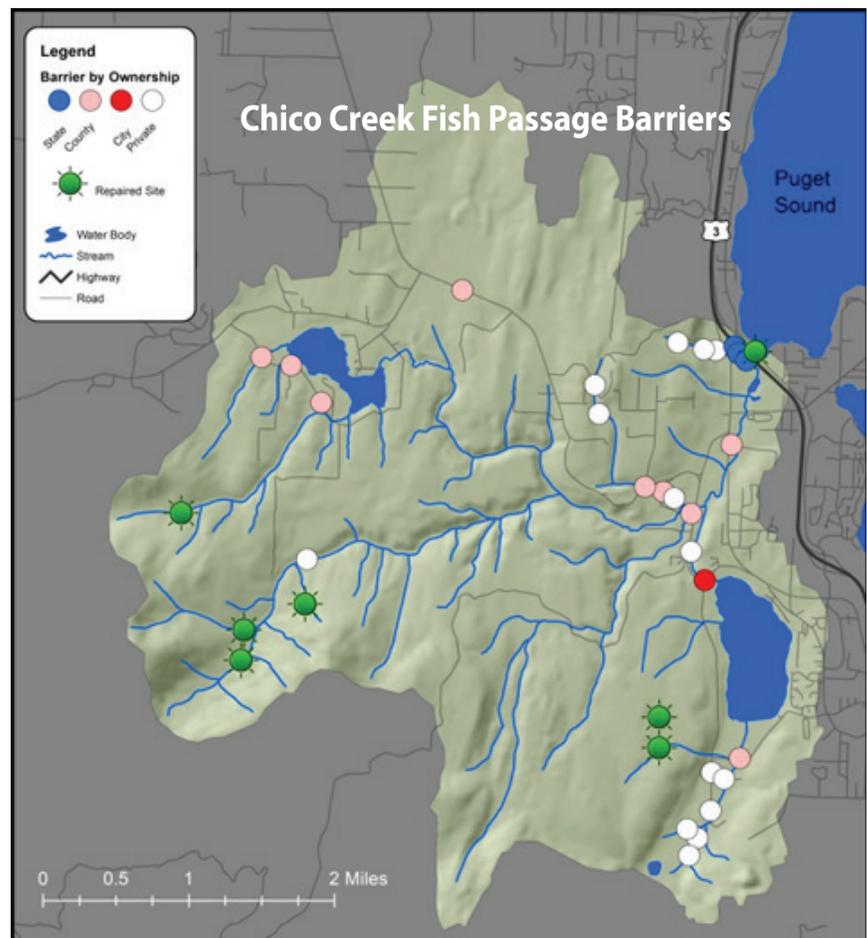
While the court decision in the “culvert case” has focused public attention on state-owned fish-passage barriers, there are far more culverts needing attention on roads owned by local governments and private landowners. For that reason, the 2014 legislation promotes a coordinated approach between the state and other landowners to remove all barriers within a stream system.

The 2014 legislation makes it clear that these multi-jurisdictional projects will not only be considered in the statewide plan but will also be eligible for funding available through state grant programs.

Chico Creek: Case study for coordination

Chico Creek watershed has 17 miles of potential habitat for anadromous fish, annually producing tens of thousands of chum and coho salmon important for tribal and recreational fisheries and to the local economy. However, there are 22 barriers restricting passage to upstream habitat for these species, as well as steelhead and sea-run cutthroat.

To date, approximately \$1.53 million has already been invested on fish passage projects in the watershed including collaborative efforts by Kitsap county, Suquamish Tribe, the state, and the forest industry. The total cost for replacing all of the fish passage barriers in Chico Creek is estimated to be approximately \$65 million, which includes the cost of correcting 22 barriers owned by various jurisdictions (state, city, county and private owners).



WSDOT is already scoping a design to replace its partial barrier in the lower watershed at an estimated cost of \$47 million, although design and construction is currently unfunded. An estimated investment of \$18 million would repair the remaining barriers to the upstream habitat.

The Chico Creek watershed is one of the most productive systems for wild salmon in the Kitsap Peninsula. The watershed has already been inventoried, and all barriers have been identified. Correcting these barriers would not only maximize the benefits of previous culvert projects on the creek, but would also enhance other restoration projects such as the placement of large wood and riparian plantings.

A stable funding source that targets fish barrier removal within the highest priority streams/sub-basins is needed to move forward on Chico Creek. This would allow for synergy with state barrier corrections that can produce economy-of-scale savings for projects proposed by state agencies, local governments, and private landowners.