



# WDFW Fish Passage Prioritization Strategy FAQ

*Revised 11/8/2024*

## **1. What is the Washington Fish Passage Prioritization Strategy and why is it being developed?**

In 2020, the Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board (FBRB) to develop a comprehensive statewide strategy through legislative provisos in the supplemental Operating Budget ([ESSB 6168](#)), the supplemental Capital Budget ([ESSB 6248](#)) and the Transportation Budget ([ESHB 2322](#)). The resulting strategy must align with the United States vs. Washington permanent injunction and RCW 77.95.180. Following this guidance, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) aims to recommend a comprehensive fish passage barrier removal strategy to the legislature that is both scientifically sound and widely supported to prioritize fish passage barrier removal at the barrier and stream system scales.

## **2. Who is leading this effort, and how will current fish passage prioritization efforts be considered?**

Per the legislature's recent budget provisos, WDFW is leading the development of the comprehensive fish passage barrier removal strategy with support from a WDFW Fish Passage Strategist on staff, and a consultant team that includes Triangle Associates and Cramer Fish Sciences. The strategy must be consistent with the principles and requirements of the United States vs. Washington permanent injunction, be coordinated with WSDOT fish barrier work plans, and include coordination and consultation with Tribes.

## **3. How will WDFW develop the prioritization strategy that will be recommended to the Legislature?**

WDFW will develop the prioritization strategy using a stepwise process that involves:

- Coordination with federally recognized Tribes with interests in Washington to help design the effort at the start, and an offer to consult with Tribes at key points in the process.
- An iterative statewide outreach and engagement with a broad range of key partners to understand interests, values, and goals for fish passage and gather feedback on the draft strategy.
- Convening a Science Panel to review and discuss existing strategies and data sources and provide input to WDFW on potential approaches and metrics.
- Conducting a review of existing science-based fish passage prioritization schemes and findings.



#### **4. What is the role of the Science Panel?**

WDFW selected a small group of scientists with appropriate expertise in areas such as evaluating fish passage projects, WDFW fish passability criteria, fish passage prioritization, salmon and steelhead ecology and life history, salmon recovery, climate change, and fish passage economics to serve on the Science Panel. The Panel will ensure a strong scientific foundation for the development of the fish passage barrier removal strategy. The Panel will provide review and input for WDFW to consider as they develop the final strategy.

#### **5. How will the State partner with Tribes in this prioritization effort?**

WDFW has and will continue to consult with federally recognized Tribes with interests in Washington prior and in addition to key partner and statewide outreach. WDFW will engage directly with Tribes throughout the development of the strategy and will work to provide opportunities to participate in a way that the Tribes indicate is respectful of Tribal sovereignty.

A high-level summary of WDFW's Tribal engagement to date (as of October 2024) includes:

- Interviewed Tribes during assessment stage (April – June 2023)
- Conducted Tribal briefings:
  1. 3-22-23
  2. 7-15-24
  3. 7-18-24
- Briefed numerous groups with Tribal representation (FBRB, regional salmon recovery groups)
- Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission participated on the Science Panel
- Tribal review/input on draft strategy took place prior to broader review.

#### **6. How will key partners and Washington State Salmon Recovery Regions be engaged?**

Representatives from partners identified in RCW 77.95.160 were invited to participate in assessment interviews at the beginning of the strategy development process to help WDFW understand the interests, values, and goals for fish passage, understand potential issues or concerns, and gather input on the process and potential approaches and methodologies. These interviews were conducted by Triangle Associates as a neutral third party, and the input shared helped shape the process for strategy development. WDFW is currently holding briefings at regional meetings and will host two in-person forums, one in Eastern Washington and one in Western Washington, to gather input and review to help ensure the strategy is set up to be successful at addressing fish passage.



## **7. What is the timeline for the Fish Passage Prioritization Strategy?**

Tribal engagement began in spring 2023, followed by key partner engagement via the Recovery Regional Boards and the entities on Fish Barrier Removal Board. The Science Panel was formed after key partner interviews were completed, and the technical review began in late spring 2023. Technical review and strategy development continued through 2023 and into 2024.

A first draft of the strategy was completed in May 2024 and is currently going through a robust review and revision process. Note that this timeline is subject to change.

## **8. How will this Fish Passage Prioritization Strategy be used by the State?**

The intent of this strategy is to focus the efforts of all culvert correction programs into a single strategic approach to maximize the benefits of public investment in salmon and orca recovery.

The resulting strategy is expected to help guide the funding recommendations of the FBRB, as well as other state fish passage barrier programs.

## **9. How is the Fish Passage Prioritization Strategy intended to support regional salmon recovery groups and efforts?**

The Strategy has been developed to be highly flexible and to support prioritization of barrier removal efforts at both the state and the watershed/regional scales. A couple ways the Strategy can support local/regional salmon recovery efforts:

- The **inclusion of scientifically supported prioritization guidance**, including criteria, for regional groups to include in their own prioritization strategies.
- **Identification of important data gaps** that should be filled to advance prioritization.

## **10. How will fisheries of Tribal and regional concern that aren't ESA-listed or aren't prey for Chinook be considered?**

The hybrid approach incorporates state-wide scores into regional prioritization schemes allowing for the inclusion of fisheries data important at the local level.

## **11. How will data gaps and errors in the hydrography and WDFW barrier database be addressed?**

- There are current efforts to update hydrography data. The recommendations from the strategy will emphasize the need for updated hydrography and additional resources to ensure that the culvert locations are correct on the stream network.



- The outputs from the optimization model will highlight priority areas for culvert inventory and assessment. It will also highlight the need for additional resources/funding for QA/QC

## **12. How will the state-wide strategy affect my local entity's prioritization scheme?**

The outputs from the state-wide optimization model may be used as a scoring criterion in local prioritization schemes but are not intended to override the funding for locally prioritized projects.

## **13. How will the strategy be used in funding decisions?**

How the strategy will be used in funding decisions may vary depending on the individual funding entity or grant program.

## **14. How will the strategy incorporate reach-scale efforts, unknown barriers, and collaboration including with WSDOT efforts?**

We foresee the state-wide optimization model as a tool to highlight high priority areas for the state and partners to invest in culvert inventory and assessment as well as coordination among landowners to determine the best path forward for removing barriers at the reach scale and in coordination with other restoration/implementation actions.

## **15. How is habitat connectivity being considered in the strategy? (especially lateral connectivity)**

The strategy focuses on stream crossings that are fish passage barriers and thus addresses lateral habitat indirectly through crossings that are located on levees, roads, or infrastructure that isolate lateral habitats. Mapping and quantification of isolated floodplains and lateral habitat is a pressing need that is outside the scope of the current strategy.

## **16. What types of barriers does the strategy address? What types of barriers does it not address?**

The strategy primarily addresses barrier culverts. It does not address federally regulated dams.

## **17. What resources will the state provide to help regions and others implement the strategy?**

At a minimum, the state will provide technical assistance to help regions and others implement the strategy.