

News

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Salmon to get fin up with new fish ladder

The project will open up 13 miles of stream and spawning habitat.

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Engineers have begun work on a new weir and fish ladder near the mouth of Pringle Creek under the Commercial Street bridge.

The project will replace the existing weir and fish ladder, which were built in 1995, hammered by the floods of 1996 and are now in ruins.

A weir is the concrete shelf over which water spills, serving as a low dam to divert or back up the water.

In June, engineers lowered concrete barriers into the creek to create a temporary dam to divert water from the construction area — the first of several phases of work. The project is slated for completion in September at a cost of about \$500,000.

State biologists consider the lower portion of Pringle Creek essential salmon habitat for winter steelhead and spring chinook, both of which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

But the new weir and fish ladder have as much to do with the safety of the Commercial Street bridge as with the well-being of fish.

When the bridge was built in the 1920s, engineers did not take into account what geologists call stream incision — the tendency of stream channels to become deeper over time, often because impervious surfaces and other effects of urbanization boost the volume and speed of water flowing in streams.

In the case of Pringle Creek, so much scouring of the channel has occurred that the bridge footings soon could have nothing left to stand on. The footings under the adjacent Boise Cascade building face a similar problem.

Inspectors with the Oregon Department of Transportation determined in 1993 that the bridge was "scour critical," said Ken Roley, project manager and city engineer.

"We had to take some action, otherwise in a few more years, we'd start to see cracks in the bridge," Roley said. "So far, it hasn't done any damage that we're aware of."

The new weir, to be made of reinforced concrete, will be much sturdier than its predecessor, which consisted of rocks wrapped in wire baskets, or gabions. It's hoped it will cause the gravel that scours the streambed to accumulate, thus stopping the channel from becoming deeper.

The new fish ladder also represents a significant upgrade. At 80 feet and with a series of 10 pools, it's twice the length of the previous one, which was designed before winter steelhead and spring chinook were listed for protection in 1999.

"When we put the fish ladder in, we open up 13 miles of stream and spawning



Erich Rabe (left) and Nick Bales of K.T. Contracting Company Inc. build a temporary dam under the Commercial Street bridge for Pringle Creek. The dam will divert water from the construction area so that engineers can build a new weir and fish ladder under the bridge.

habitat," said Elizabeth Sagmiller, natural resources planner with the city. "So the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has given this project their blessing."

Local watershed activists welcomed the move.

"We worked for a long time to help the city do that," said Wendy Kroger, former president of the Pringle Creek Watershed Council. "We think it's a great idea. It's the first giant step for fish to get back up Pringle Creek."

Before the structures are put in place, engineers will build a special channel beside the creek that will allow fish to move up and down the stream while construction is under way.

The project is being funded with money from the city's water and sewer fund and with a \$75,000 fish-passage cost-share grant from ODFW.

In another fish-related project this summer, city engineers will build a fish screen across the Mill Race — a manmade waterway originally designed to supply water to Mission Mill — near Mill Race Park on Ferry Street SE.

The purpose of the fish screen is to prevent protected salmon and steelhead from entering Mill Race, which is poor fish habitat. Mill Race Park will be closed during the construction phase, set to begin in mid-July, but will be rehabilitated after the project is complete.

In addition, a fish ladder at Waller Dam on Mill Creek will be updated to improve fish passage.

The projects will cost about \$750,000, of which \$75,000 will be covered by an ODFW grant, project manager Chris Hutchison said.

Local residents may see some silting in the Mill Race and Mill Creek at times due to construction activities, but the city has obtained permits from state and federal agencies that allow a limited amount of turbidity, Hutchison said.

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