



Providing opportunities for stakeholders to cooperate in promoting and sustaining the health of the watershed and its communities.

December 12, 2025

City of Salem – City Council
440 Church St, NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Mayor and Members of the Salem City Council,

On behalf of the North Santiam Watershed Council (NSWC), I am writing to respectfully invite official City of Salem City Council participation on the Mill Creek–Waller Advisory Committee (WAC). This committee is being formed to help guide planning and design for improved fish passage and habitat restoration at Waller Dam and nearby reaches of Mill Creek and the Mill Race in Salem. In October 2023, the City of Salem formally endorsed this work through a City Manager–signed letter of support for the NOAA grant, acknowledging the importance of addressing fish passage and sedimentation at Waller Dam (see attached).

The Waller Dam complex, including associated Mill Creek and Mill Race structures, is a City-owned and City-maintained asset located primarily within Ward 2, with Mill Creek downstream of the dam continuing through Ward 1. The surrounding neighborhood has shown strong and sustained interest in this project, with residents actively advocating for improvements at the site. As the owner of Waller Dam, the City of Salem has a unique opportunity to receive permit-ready, stakeholder-informed designs at no cost, supported by staff participation and leadership engagement to align the work with City priorities. Given the high level of community interest, the ongoing costs and operational challenges of maintaining aging infrastructure, and associated public safety and flood risks, it is important that the outcomes of this project reflect community values, City priorities, and transparent stewardship of public resources. Formal City Council involvement at this stage would help carry forward prior commitments and ensure continued alignment between technical work, community input, and City priorities.

About the North Santiam Watershed Council

The North Santiam Watershed Council is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit watershed council whose mission is to provide opportunities for stakeholders to cooperate in promoting and sustaining the health of the North Santiam watershed and its communities. The NSWC’s extended service area includes the Mill Creek subbasin, which receives augmented flows from the North Santiam River, through a diversion in Stayton, to Mill Creek. The North Santiam is also the primary drinking water source for the City of Salem.

About the Mill Creek–Waller Advisory Committee

The WAC is being established to bring together watershed partners, technical experts, community leaders, and local voices whose experience will help guide planning and design for improved fish passage and habitat restoration at Waller Dam and nearby reaches of Mill Creek and the Mill Race. The committee will serve as a collaborative forum to share knowledge, perspectives, and recommendations as part of NSWC’s Mill Creek Fish Passage Barriers Improvement Project, funded by the NOAA Restoration Center as part of the Mid-Valley River Connections collaboration award.

The WAC will ensure that cultural and community values are reflected in project decisions for alternatives analysis and preferred alternative selection. The committee will help integrate community priorities, such as cultural connections to fish and wildlife species, safety, recreation, and flood resilience, into decision-making and public communications.

Request for Council Participation

We respectfully request that the City of Salem formally appoint one or more City Councilors to serve on the Mill Creek–Waller Advisory Committee. Council representation will:

- Help ensure that City and community priorities are reflected in the evaluation of fish passage alternatives at this City-owned and maintained dam complex;
- Support transparent communication between the project team, the City, and the broader community; and
- Provide a direct link between the Advisory Committee’s work and Council’s broader policy discussions related to public safety, infrastructure, habitat, and climate resilience.

Committee Membership and Commitment

Committee members will serve in a voluntary advisory capacity and will:

- Attend quarterly meetings during the study and design phase (2026–2027; approximately 1.5–2 hours per meeting, held in Salem or virtually);
- Review and provide feedback on project materials;
- Represent their community or organization in good faith; and
- Collaborate respectfully with other members and project partners.

Members are not responsible for regulatory or final project decisions; rather, their input will directly inform recommendations and guide NSWC and partner planning efforts.

Thank you for considering this request for official City Council involvement in the Mill Creek–Waller Advisory Committee, and for your ongoing service to the community. I would be happy to meet with City staff or Councilors to provide a brief project orientation or answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Brandin Hilbrandt
Executive Director
North Santiam Watershed Council



CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

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October 6, 2023

NOAA Fish Passage Review Team

SUBJECT: Mary's River Watershed Council's "There and Back Again, a Salmonid's Tale" Fish Passage Restoration Application

To the NOAA Fish Passage Review Committee Members,

The City of Salem (City) submits this letter in support of the Mary's River Watershed Council's (MRWC) proposal to NOAA for funding to restore fish passage throughout the Mid-Willamette region. The MRWC proposal is being submitted on behalf of the Mid-Valley River Connections (MVRC), which is a decade-long collaborative partnership that consists of five different watershed councils (Calapooia, Luckiamute, Mary's River, North Santiam, and South Santiam Watershed Councils) that collectively represent roughly 30 percent of the Willamette River watershed.

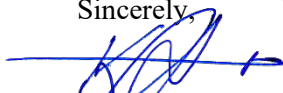
The City of Salem is located along the mainstem of the Willamette River, and our primary drinking water facility is located on the North Santiam River. Mill Creek is a tributary to the Willamette River that traverses the City of Salem and is fed in part by a diversion from the North Santiam River. Mill Creek, the Willamette River, and North Santiam River are all listed as Critical Habitat for Upper Willamette River Spring Chinook Salmon and Winter Steelhead.

As part of the MVRC grant application, North Santiam Watershed Council (NSWC) proposes to analyze fish passage issues at two structures on Mill Creek: Waller Dam and the Penitentiary Dam. Waller Dam is owned by the City and is located within a disadvantaged census block. Properties upstream of the dam are known to be vulnerable to flood risk due to an accumulation of sediment upstream of the dam. The City has conducted several studies and alternatives assessments aimed at identifying a feasible long-term solution for reducing sedimentation and flooding. We acknowledge that additional work is needed to better understand the ecological and social implications of the identified alternatives, including fish passage and fish habitat, as well as downstream implications of each alternative and the potential for full dam removal (something the City has not analyzed previously).

The City supports the NSWC's proposed approach and commits to providing access to previous studies, access to the site, staff support, and participation in the stakeholder engagement process. The City intends to use the resulting design to assist in identifying funding and obtaining permits for implementation.

The City of Salem urges NOAA to support this unique partnership of five watershed councils, each with a long list of successful fish passage and habitat restoration projects, to improve fish access in the considerable portion of the Willamette River watersheds they serve.

Sincerely,



Keith Stahley, ICMA-CM
City Manager

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

Women, minorities, and disabled are encouraged to apply • ADA Accommodations will be provided upon request