

Southwest Oregon Culverts (Pilot Program)

Frequently Asked Questions

Starting in 2015, the Oregon Department of Transportation will replace more than 150 culverts along Oregon 38 (Umpqua Highway) and U.S. 101 (Oregon Coast Highway) in Douglas County and Coos County. Many of the culverts are aging and damaged, requiring frequent maintenance to address drainage problems. The three-year pilot program, a joint effort of ODOT and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), is intended to improve drainage and fish passage along streams crossing under the highways.

How many culverts are you repairing or replacing?

There are nearly 700 culverts within the Oregon 38 and U.S. 101 project areas. Due to limited funding, this pilot program will only address the approximately 150 culverts that are rated as poor or in critical condition. Of those 150 culverts, about one-third will be repaired and the rest will be replaced.

Where are these culverts located?

Of the 150 culverts, about two-thirds are on Oregon 38 and the remainder are located along U.S. 101 between the Lane/Douglas County Line (milepost 198) and the Oregon 42 junction (milepost 245).

Why are you replacing so many culverts now?

Most of these culverts are aging or damaged, but they were not replaced in recent years due to environmental concerns and the cost of meeting state laws regarding fish passage. Last year, ODOT and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reached an agreement that will allow work to go forward.

According to an ODFW news release, the three-year pilot program will make it easier for ODOT to make short-term repairs to culverts within its highway system. In return for including site-specific improvements in fish passage where possible, ODOT will



receive a temporary reprieve from the state's fish passage requirements that often involve more costly repairs to provide full passage to native migratory fish.

Why are there several different projects?

Due to the large number of culverts, it was not possible to include all culverts in a single project so the culverts were organized into smaller groups.

The construction schedule is largely dictated by design necessity. Bigger culverts are usually more complicated to replace and require more design time. Small culverts are easier to repair, which is why they are scheduled first.

In 2015, ODOT will focus on culvert repairs in the summer on Oregon 38, then along U.S. 101 in the fall. Culverts that will be a little more problematic and require more design time have been pushed out to 2016.

The most complicated projects will begin construction in 2017. These include box culverts that we are replacing, either with a bridge or another culvert, or small and medium-size culverts that have unique design issues or that may be buried deep under the roadway.

Why don't you repair or replace all of the culverts at the same time so you only impact one summer instead of three?

Because of the large number of culverts, there is not enough time to do them all in one season. And if we did attempt to repair and replace all of them during one season, we would have to work at several locations at once, and traffic delays could easily exceed an hour on each corridor. We



believe it is better to space them out. Tourists and commuters may be delayed on four consecutive summers, but the delays won't be as long.

At most locations, traffic will only be delayed a couple of minutes. But there may be several work zones along a highway, and there could be a cumulative effect.

Why don't you do all of the Highway 38 culverts one year, and all of the Highway 101 culverts the next?

Traffic delays would be unbearable. We are repairing or replacing more than 100 culverts on Oregon 38, and trying to do all of them in one year would make the Umpqua Highway the longest parking lot in Oregon.

Why didn't you replace the culverts the last time you paved the highway?

We agree that the best time to replace a culvert is before scheduling a paving project. Unfortunately, we didn't know five or ten years ago that ODOT and ODFW would reach an agreement that would allow us to move forward on these long-delayed culvert replacements.

Will the ground settle after a new culvert is installed?

Although we will compact the soil as much as possible at each location, the ground may settle an inch or two the first couple of months after a culvert is replaced. In some areas, we will need to go back and level the asphalt to eliminate any bumps.

How is this project being funded?

ODOT has funds specifically identified for culvert repairs and for fish passage. Those funds have been pooled from around the state and directed to this pilot program.

How does this project benefit the public?

Erosion is one of the most powerful forces on the planet, and good drainage is essential to protecting our roads. Many of these culverts are damaged or no longer functioning properly and eventually will fail, allowing water to erode the road fill. Repairing and replacing these culverts will help reduce maintenance costs and prevent washouts and slides.

The fish passage elements also benefit the local economy by making the area a more desirable place for tourists to visit and go fishing.

For more information on this pilot program, please visit www.SouthwestOregonCulverts.com.