

Partnership and Permitting: Lessons Learned Through Brownsville and Gold Hill Dam Removals

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The recent removal of the Brownsville and Gold Hill dams required the consideration of a variety of environmental, design, and sociocultural factors. The planning and implementation of these restoration efforts was a collaborative process involving many partners, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Open Rivers Initiative, local governments, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, watershed councils, local nonprofit environmental organizations, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, local residents, and many other stakeholders and experts. Both of these projects provide interesting examples of technical considerations, permitting, community involvement, and monitoring. In this poster presentation we will compare and contrast the challenges and successes of these case studies to understand how social and economic issues inform small dam removal and restoration in small communities in Oregon.

The Brownsville dam and the Gold Hill dam were both non-functional, concrete dams that were removed to enhance fish passage and stimulate economic and environmental renewal. However, each project presented unique challenges. When the Brownsville dam was removed on August 27th, 2007, it opened up 63 miles of mainstem and tributary habitat, leaving only one last mainstem barrier, which is also slated for removal. While the Brownsville Dam impeded winter steelhead and spring Chinook salmon access to reaches of the Calapooia River, it also formed a recreational swimming hole during the summer months and diverted water to a scenic canal that meanders through town. A consensus based approach was adopted to incorporate the social, regulatory, and technical issues at hand. Removal of the Gold Hill Dam was completed in August 2008. Considered the second highest priority fish passage barrier on the Rogue River, the Gold Hill Dam limited upstream access for spring and fall Chinook salmon, summer and winter steelhead, coho salmon, and a variety of other species to 353 miles of habitat. Property rights, safety, and recreation were important factors during planning and implementation.

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