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## **Cowlitz Indian Tribe and Columbia Land Trust Complete Removal of Kwoneesum Dam In Washougal River Watershed**

*After four months of de-construction, the dam's removal will restore a natural ecosystem, immediately benefitting salmon and steelhead*

**WASHOUGAL, WA** – The Cowlitz Indian Tribe and Columbia Land Trust are proud to announce that the Kwoneesum Dam, a defunct dam near the headwaters of a Washougal River tributary in Skamania County, Washington, has been removed, completing a de-construction project that was launched in May 2024.

“We are thrilled to have successfully completed the removal of Kwoneesum dam,” said Pete Barber, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe's Habitat Restoration Program Manager and the lead for the Kwoneesum dam removal project. “This was a significant undertaking, made possible by a collaboration of dedicated individuals and groups all set on restoring this area to its original beauty and repairing this vital ecosystem.”

The effort to remove Kwoneesum Dam was a multi-year process between the tribe, Columbia Land Trust, and additional partners who worked collaboratively to restore fish passage to key spawning habitat within the Washougal River watershed and improve a critical natural ecosystem within the Cowlitz Indian Tribe's ancestral lands.

“The removal of Kwoneesum Dam marks a significant milestone in our journey to restore the natural beauty and ecological balance of our ancestral lands, which in this case has been in the process for many years,” said William Iyall, Cowlitz Indian Tribe Chairman. “As we work to restore the area to its original state, we honor our ancestors and ensure that future generations will continue to thrive in harmony with the land. We are thrilled to see this project enter this crucial stage, bringing us closer to a restored and revitalized ecosystem.”

“Columbia Land Trust is here to deliver conservation that lasts, and that has meaning for the peoples and places where we work,” said Executive Director Meg Rutledge. “Being able to collaborate with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, who always have been and always will be leaders in stewarding and caring for lands and people, is a privilege. The dam removal is the first phase in our shared vision for the restoration of the ecological integrity of this landscape.”

## **Background**

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe and its ancestors have sustained the land, rivers, and resources of present-day Southwest Washington for time immemorial -- including the lands within the Wildboy Forest. For generations, the natural resources of Washougal watershed – from sacred salmon and steelhead species to first foods and medicines – have provided the foundation for the Cowlitz way of life, its teachings, traditional practices, and cultural heritage.

In 1965, the Camp Fire organization built Kwoneesum Dam at the confluence of three creeks to create a recreational lake for a new girls’ camp. Girls from across the region spent summers swimming, sailing, and canoeing there until the mid-1980s, when the camp closed, and the land was sold to an industrial timber company. Despite its scenic appearance, the stagnant lake is a complete barrier to fish passage, and it absorbs sunlight and increases water temperature, which can be fatal to adult and juvenile salmon and steelhead.

After being managed for forestry, the land was again put up for sale in 2019. Cowlitz Indian Tribe staff saw a crucial opportunity and alerted Columbia Land Trust, who raised funds and purchased the 1,300-acre site in 2020, conserving the land and embarking on a collaborative effort to remove the dam and revitalize the Washougal River watershed.

In addition to benefiting fish species, the Kwoneesum Dam removal partnership will also allow the Tribe to apply its traditional knowledge and land management practices as this vital ecosystem recovers, ensuring sacred plants and species are protected and managed in a manner that respects our cultural values and practices.

## **Partners**

The land purchase was funded with grants from the Open Rivers Fund, a program of Resources Legacy Fund supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, as well as funding from Washington Department of Ecology’s water quality program, Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, Hugh and Jane Ferguson Foundation, Wiancko Family Foundation, The Conservation Alliance, private donors, a program-related investment loan from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the Pacific Northwest Resilient Landscapes Initiative with support from the Land Trust Alliance, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and Oregon Community Foundation.

The dam removal was funded by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service – Environmental Quality Incentives Program, NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation, Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office - Salmon Recovery Funding Board & Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board, Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund, Open Rivers Fund, a program of Resources Legacy Fund supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

### **Additional Details**

As an embankment dam, the process began with diversion of upstream flows and then the removal of 104 acre-feet of water, an estimated 20,000,000 gallons, from the reservoir. The de-watering and dam de-construction process started in the spring and concluded near the end of the summer.

A half mile section of Wildboy Creek channel downstream of the dam was enhanced with the installation of logjams and logs anchored to bedrock, then covered with rock and gravel to restore the degraded streambed and provide spawning substrates. Additionally, three new tributary channels were excavated within the reservoir footprint and restored using logs and native gravels including those excavated and stockpiled from the initial reservoir excavation, dating back to 1965.

Now that the dam has been removed, additional restoration, erosion control, and native planting activities will continue this fall/winter within the nine-acre footprint of the former reservoir and the surrounding forest.

For public safety, following the dam removal the forest and dam area will remain closed to the public until initial restoration efforts are complete. Ultimately, the Land Trust plans re-open the property to the public for day use in 2025.

### **Photo/Video Assets**

- Photos from before and after the dam removal can be found [here](#)
- A timelapse video of dam removal can be found [here](#)
- [Photos](#) from mussel relocation activities on Thursday, October 10, 2024
  - Prior to dam deconstruction, Columbia Land Trust staff worked with the Xerces Society to relocate about 3,000 western pearlshell freshwater mussels from a section Wildboy Creek that was going to be de-watered during the dam removal process. In October, the mussels were then moved from their temporary habitat in the creek to a larger area of long-term habitat. These mussels can live for more than 70 years, improve water quality by filtering gallons of water each day, and support other species that enrich our rivers.
- Pictures from a Cowlitz Indian Tribe and Columbia Land Trust event held at the beginning of construction in May 2024 can be found [here](#)
- Historic photos from Nancy King of the Camp Fire Organization can be found [here](#)
- Additional high-res photos of Kwoneesum Dam are available upon request

### **About Cowlitz Indian Tribe**

We, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, are the Forever People. Since the beginning of time, we have nurtured our community by stewarding our lands and rivers, investing in our people and culture, and promoting self-determination and prosperity for future generations. Our mission is to preserve and honor the legacy of our elders and ancestors by empowering a tribal community that promotes social justice and economic well-being, secures aboriginal lands, respects culture and sovereignty, and fosters justice, freedom, and mutual welfare. More information can be found at [www.cowlitz.org](http://www.cowlitz.org).

### **About Columbia Land Trust**

[Columbia Land Trust](#) is a nonprofit organization that conserves and cares for the vital lands, waters, and wildlife of the lower Columbia River region, through sound science and strong relationships. Since 1991 the Land Trust has conserved more than 58,000 acres of land in Oregon and Washington to enhance communities, ecosystems, and connections with nature.

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