



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**MEDIA TOURS and INTERVIEWS available, contact Brent Lawrence \*\*\*[LINK to project photos](#)**

## Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge Reopens on May 1

*Reopening ceremony scheduled for May 7*

Washougal, WA – After two years of closure to complete the largest habitat restoration project in the history of the lower Columbia River, Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge reopens to the public on May 1.

Construction on the Steigerwald Reconnection Project began in 2019 to reduce flood risk, reconnect 965 acres of Columbia River floodplain, and increase recreation opportunities at the refuge.

The Steigerwald Reconnection Project benefits juvenile salmon and steelhead migrating to the ocean by increasing Columbia River floodplain habitat between the Bonneville Dam and Willamette River by 19%. It also increases habitat along the Pacific Flyway, a migratory bird path extending from Alaska to Patagonia. The \$31 million project also generated approximately 503 local jobs and brought in more than \$67 million to Washington's economy.

The refuge scheduled a [reopening ceremony with project partners and the public](#) on Saturday, May 7 if [the CDC Clark County COVID-19 Community Levels](#) remain at low or medium levels.

Steigerwald Reconnection Project accomplishments include:

- Expanding the refuge by 160 acres through Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust property acquisition and transfer to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Removing 2.2 miles of Columbia River levee and connecting the river to its historic floodplain for the first time in more than 50 years.
- Restoring salmon-bearing Gibbons Creek to its natural channel, while removing the fish ladder at the confluence of the creek and the Columbia River.
- Constructing 1.6 miles of new setback levees to enhance protection of the Port of Camas-Washougal Industrial Park, city of Washougal wastewater treatment plant, and private residents.
- Raising a portion of State Route 14 to the Columbia River's 500-year flood level.
- Moving and expanding the refuge parking lot.
- Creating more than 100 acres of wetland and reforesting 250 acres of riparian habitat, planting more than 500,000 trees and shrubs and more than 14,000 pounds of native seeds.

- Adding 1.1 miles of new trail to the urban refuge.

“Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge has always been home to a diversity of wildlife. We are so grateful to our partners, volunteers and supporters,” said Juliette Fernandez, Refuge Manager, Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex. “Through this amazing partnership, we have seen new habitats form right before our eyes and we are already seeing wildlife respond like never before. This is an amazing reconnection for salmon, lamprey, waterbirds, and other wildlife, but it is also an invitation for our visitors and valued community to reconnect in a whole new way.”

“The Steigerwald Reconnection Project is a blueprint for habitat restoration on the lower Columbia River that benefits people, salmon, and wildlife,” said Elaine Placido, Executive Director of the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership. “The Steigerwald Reconnection Project is also a shining example of how strong partnerships between state and federal agencies, local governments, environmental nonprofits, schools, and community members can be leveraged to simultaneously achieve habitat, recreation, and economic goals.”

“The Steigerwald Reconnection Project not only expanded recreation opportunities, but it also essentially eliminated flood risk to the Port’s Industrial Park, which is the economic engine for our community, and greatly reduced our operations and maintenance costs,” said David Ripp, CEO for the Port of Camas-Washougal. “At a time when everyone is looking for a way to stretch their dollar a little bit further, this project checks all the right boxes. It’s been a pleasure partnering with the Estuary Partnership, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rotschy, and other members of this phenomenal project team.”

“A healthy Columbia River is essential for maintaining and preserving Washington’s environment and restoring our threatened salmon runs,” said Laura Watson, director for the Washington Department of Ecology. “The Steigerwald Reconnection Project helps reestablish hundreds of acres of floodplain habitat in a portion of the river where restoration opportunities are limited. The project also helps lower local flood risks, boosts aquatic habitat for salmon and other important species, and increases recreational opportunities on state shorelines. We are proud to have provided \$4.4 million in Floodplains by Design funding, as well as support to remove invasive species, plant native vegetation and conduct student field trips to the refuge.”

“The Steigerwald Reconnection Project is the largest BPA-funded estuary restoration project to-date and we are excited to be part of the stakeholder team helping fish regain access to nearly 1,000 acres of feeding and rearing habitat,” said Scott Armentrout, Bonneville Power Administration executive vice president of Environment, Fish and Wildlife. “We, like our partners, are working to improve conditions to support a resilient and sustainable population of native fish. We have learned through the decades that we can achieve so much more when we work together for fish and wildlife impacted by the construction and operation of the federal hydropower system.”

More information about the Steigerwald Reconnection Project can be found at <https://www.refuge2020.info/steigerwald-reconnection-project>

Funding sources for the Steigerwald Reconnection Project include the Bonneville Power Administration, Washington Department of Ecology, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bonneville Environmental Foundation. For a full list of funders and project partners [visit the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership website](#)

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