Commonly Asked Questions about WSDOT Fish Passage Barrier Culverts

How can I find out if there are fish passage barriers in my project area?
A list of WSDOT fish passage culverts can be found in the WSDOT Fish Passage Inventory Annual report, which is located on WSDOT's Biology Program Webpage. For additional information please contact:

- *Jon Peterson - WSDOT Fish Passage Coordinator 360-705-7499 or peterjn@wsdot.wa.gov*

Or

- *Eva Wilder - WDFW 360-902-2411or wildeelw@dfw.wa.gov*

What is a PI?
PI stands for Priority Index and is a numeric indicator used to consolidate the many factors related to a fish barrier removal project (such as expected passage improvement, production potential of the blocked stream, fish stock health, etc.) The PI is used for developing prioritized lists of stand-alone fish barrier removal projects. Stand-alone fish barrier removal projects are prioritized by WDFW to target sequential correction of barriers that have the largest gains in fish habitat and the greatest production benefits for fish (higher the PI the greater the benefits). The PI for most culverts is listed in the WDFW data base.

What if a culvert barrier does not have a PI? Does that mean the culvert is a low priority?
It means that WDFW inventoried the culvert but has not yet completed the habitat assessment work necessary to calculate the PI. WSDOT can ask WDFW to complete the work necessary to establish a PI if that information is needed for a particular project. The PI plays an important role in the prioritization of I-4 Fish Barrier removal projects and should not be a factor in deciding which culverts are replaced as part of a highway project.

What about a culvert that is listed a partial barrier – do we still need to fix it?
The culvert is still considered a barrier. The percent passability is factored into the PI. A partially passable culvert will have a lower PI than one that has a full blockage.

A culvert on my highway project has a low PI and it's my understanding that WSDOT only fixes high priority culverts, does this mean I don't need to fix this one?
If a transportation (safety or mobility) project involves work on a fish barrier culvert that requires a Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA), then WSDOT is required to fix the barrier as part of that project.

I'm getting conflicting answers about whether a culvert on my project is a barrier or not – what should I do to resolve this?
Call us and we can help make sure you talk to the appropriate people at WSDOT and WDFW to determine if the culvert is a barrier or not.

We have a fish passage barrier culvert within our project's limits that has less than 200 meters of habitat upstream from the culvert. Do we have to fix it?
If work on the culvert requires an HPA then yes, the culvert does need to be corrected or replaced. The less than 200 meters of habitat criteria is used for stand-alone culverts being corrected using I-4 funds and not those being fixed as part of a highway construction project.

We have a fish passage culvert barrier that will cost fourteen million dollars to replace with a fish passable one that only provides fish passage to a very short degraded section of stream that ends in a storm water pond. Should we do this?
In very rare cases, an exception may be made if it is determined that a barrier correction requiring an HPA would provide an extremely minimal gain for fish and require extraordinary high cost. Consideration of this exception would require agreement with WDFW and would not be based on the presence of other human caused barriers in the stream. In this case, it is understood that WSDOT is ultimately responsible to correct the barrier in the future, and may be required to provide mitigation to compensate for the habitat loss resulting from the presence of the barrier until it is corrected.

We are getting ready to complete permitting for our project and just discovered two new fish barrier culverts. We don't have any money left in our project; can we use I-4 funds to fix these culverts?
This question emphasizes the importance of early identification of deficiencies that need to be fixed as part of any highway safety and mobility construction project. I-4 funds are not available to fix culverts that would ordinarily be fixed as part of a highway construction project (no matter when they are found in the project process). This would defeat the purpose of having a stand-alone retrofit program that targets the highest priority culverts that would otherwise not be corrected during a highway project anytime in the near future.

Our project office has been assigned a fish passable culvert. Are there any guidelines to help us in designing this project?
Design of fish barrier correction will is based on the latest version of WDFW's Design at of Road Culverts for Fish Passage manual (available on line at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hab/engineer/cm/). Engineering assistance and guidance is also available from staff the WDFW's Technical Applications Division.

There is a barrier culvert within our road project but we don't need to touch it – so won't need an HPA. Do we need to fix this culvert as part of our highway project?
Serious consideration should be given to correcting the barrier, even though WSDOT is not required to do so. Consider the cost of the barrier correction relative to the overall cost of the project. Also, in this case, the quantity and quality of the upstream habitat

should be considered in making the decision. Remember, very few fish passage barriers are fixed under the I-4 Fish Passage Program. We need to take advantage of opportunities to correct barriers during other projects while crews and equipment are mobilized to significantly reduce the number of fish passage barriers under state highways. Remember, if the barrier is not fixed during the road project, it remains on the barrier list and must be fixed at some point in the future. Sometimes avoiding fixing the culvert during the current highway project may make future corrections difficult and costly, if for example, the current project buries the culvert with fifty feet of fill.

We are widening the road over a fish passage barrier culvert and plan on avoiding an HPA by constructing vertical retaining walls so we don't need to touch the culvert. Is that OK?

Technically the answer is yes. If your project does not require an HPA you are not required to make the culvert fish passable. However, we want project offices to carefully consider the cost of avoiding making the culvert fish passable with the additional cost of making it passable at some future date after the construction of the retaining walls. Remember, the barrier will need to be fixed eventually so any action you take to avoid correcting the barrier will only add to the cost of making it passable in the future. It may make more sense to fix the culvert now than to triple to cost of fixing it when another project comes along in a few years that can't avoid an HPA and must make the culvert fish passable.