



MEMORANDUM

To: Board of County Commissioners
From: Mike Russell, Public Works Director, Roadmaster MR
Cc: Ed McGlone, Assistant County Counsel
Date: June 11, 2025
Subject: Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife Proposal to Control Traffic on Reeder Road During Weekends and Holidays

Action Requested

Staff from Public Works and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) will be coming to the Board to discuss ODFW's desire to control traffic on Reeder Road, a County road, into their Sauvie Island Wildlife Area during weekends and holidays for the upcoming recreation season.

The Board will be asked to provide staff direction on how to proceed, which could include permitting the control of traffic on this County road through the appropriate legal instrument while mitigating any County liabilities, or any other direction as the Board sees fit.

Background

Steve Niemela, ODFW's Watershed Manager for the North Willamette Watershed District, contacted Public Works the week of June 2 to share their plan to enact a temporary ODFW rule that limits wildlife area parking off Reeder Road, north of Rentenaar Road, on weekends and state holidays starting June 28, 2025, and ending September 1, 2025 (Labor Day).

Under ODFW's temporary rule, in addition to their normal parking permit requirements, they will issue a limited number of free entry passes through their Electronic Licensing System for access to the Sauvie Island Beaches parking areas on those dates. To ensure compliance, they plan to establish a checkpoint at the intersection of Reeder Road and Rentenaar Road to control entry and hire a third-party vendor to manage traffic and help with crowd control. The vendor will inform visitors without the proper passes that they do not have a legal parking spot and turn them away at the checkpoint.

ODFW has indicated that Oregon State Police (OSP) and their own enforcement officers will enforce violations, and illegally parked vehicles will be towed. In some situations, when parking is full or traffic is creating an unsafe condition, they want the ability to close the road to all northbound traffic by the general public.

They have said that they are talking to neighbors in the area. There are four other property owners, beside ODFW, beyond Rentenaar Road, three right at the Rentenaar Road intersection, and one near the end of Reeder Road to the north. ODFW is working on plans to limit any traffic delays for local residents and their visitors.

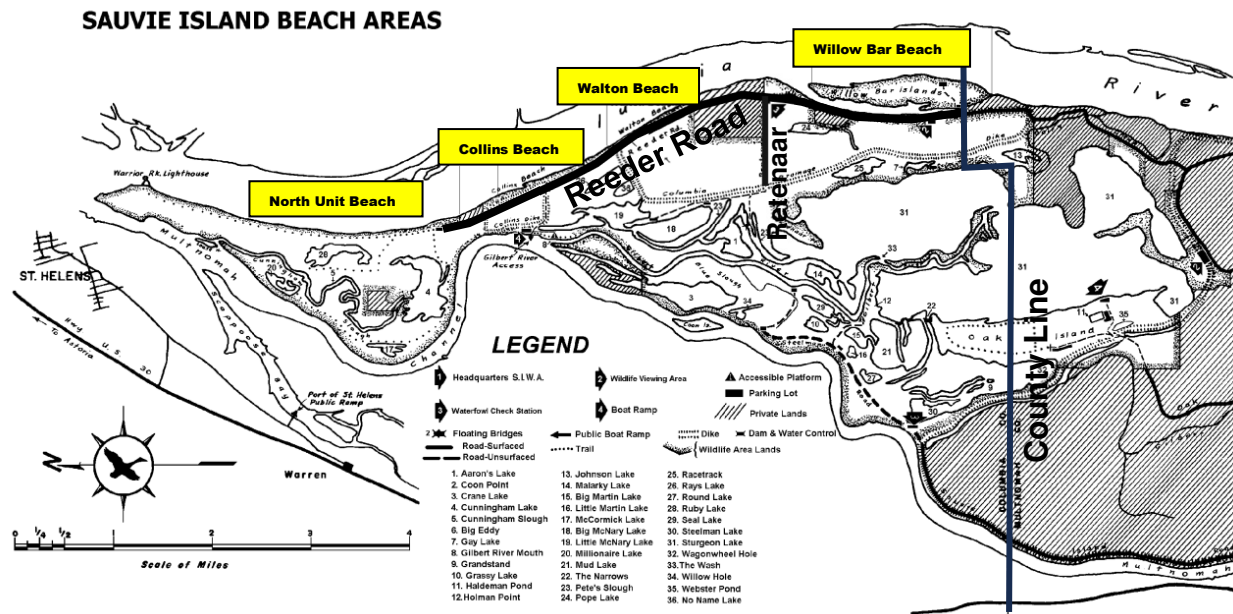
In summary, ODFW is asking the County to support their plan to establish the checkpoint on Reeder Road, which could cause delays as well as occasional road closures, to improve safety along the ODFW beach areas and reduce parking-related congestion.

The Sauvie Island Wildlife Area and Reeder Road

The ODFW Sauvie Island Wildlife Area is a 11,643-acre site at the northern tip of Sauvie Island. The area was established in 1947 with primary objectives of protecting and improving waterfowl habitat and providing a public hunting area, but the area has become a popular spot for beach access to the Columbia River during hot days.

The area starts right at the Columbia/Multnomah County Line on Reeder Road. Reeder Road is the main access to the east side (Columbia River side) of the area. Reeder Road is paved to MP 3.76 where the travels surface turns to gravel for the remainder of its length, ending at MP 6.00.

Reeder Road provides parking areas for beach access to the Columbia River at various points along the road. The Wildlife Area includes Willow Bar Beach, Walton Beach, Collins Beach (clothing optional), and North Unit Beach all along the Columbia River. Each has its own parking areas directly off the western shoulder of Reeder Road, generally within the right-of-way.



Retenaar Road is approximately 2 miles to the north of the County Line on Reeder Road. Between the County Line and Retenaar Road, there are private residences and businesses like the Island Cove RV Park and Island Cove Market.

Walton Beach

Beyond Retenaar Road, the area where ODFW wants to regulate access, the first large parking area is at Walton Beach starting at MP 2.83 on the west side of the road and continues for approximately 2,970 feet. The parking area is gravel and approximately 35 to 40 feet deep. There is room here for approximately 350 vehicles to park, but they often double park, so it is not unusual for over 500 vehicles to be parked here.

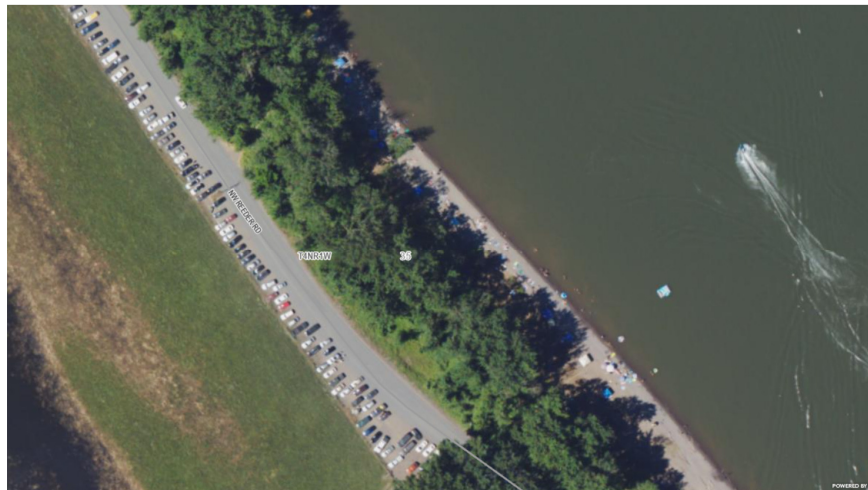


A portion of Walton Beach parking area on a busy day

The photo above shows the queuing of traffic on the northbound lane of Reeder Road as vehicles try to find parking at Walton Beach. ODFW has said this is a common occurrence and can last for a long time, essentially narrowing the road down to one lane for emergency access.

Collins Beach

The next large parking area is for Collins Beach, a clothing optional beach, that starts at MP 3.86 on the west side of the road and continues for approximately 4,340 feet. The parking area here is a little shallower at 30 to 35 feet deep. There is room here for approximately 520 vehicles, but like Walton Beach, people often double park here so it is not unusual for over 1,000 vehicles to park here.



A portion of Collins Beach parking area on a busy day

Gilbert River Boat Ramp

Columbia County operates and maintains a boat ramp facility at Gilbert River Boat Ramp to the east of Reeder Road at MP 4.69. The intersection for entering the boat ramp area is within the Collins Beach parking area.



Gilbert River Boat Ramp (on the left side of the photo)

North Unit Parking Area

Reeder Road ends at the North Unit parking area at MP 6.00. This is a relatively small parking lot with no clear parking stalls, so vehicles park their own way. It is hard to tell what capacity may be, but looking at aerial photos, it appears to be about 50 to 60 vehicles. As this parking lot fills, vehicles begin to park outside the lot along the edge of Reeder Road, against regulation.



North Unit parking lot at end of Reeder Road



Example of signage along Reeder Road

Historic Issues and Current Regulations

Currently, there is no parking allowed (signed) along the eastern edge of Reeder Road within all of the parking areas mentioned above. There is no room for parking in areas between the designated parking areas due to topography or fencing along Reeder Road. There is signed “No Parking” along either side of the road starting at MP 4.98 until the parking area at the end of the road at MP 6.00.

Alcohol use and possession is prohibited for the entire Wildlife Area and is signed as such at various points along the road and at beach access points.

While a majority of park visitors are just out for a wonderful day at the beach, ODFW and OSP have said they experience a range of aberrant behavior in the area including drunk and disorderly, trespassing onto private property, and other issues.

The main safety concern revolves around the traffic, however. This is why ODFW is wanting to focus on limiting access to a specific number of vehicles and be able to shut down access, if needed. Because of the nature of the parking areas, vehicles are able to park however they want and double or triple park. On busy days, traffic is often backing up on Reeder Road for hundreds of feet while vehicles are waiting to turn into a vacating parking spot. Vehicles will also try to maneuver around parked vehicles to leave. There are also issues with parked vehicles encroaching into travel lanes, effectively reducing the road to a single lane. Finally, because parking is on the west side of the road and the beach is on the east side of the road, conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians is common and can be dangerous.

County Authority and Ability to Permit Requested Use of County Road

Public Works is willing to work with ODFW to help support their desire to make the road safer during peak use times. Because the road is under County jurisdiction, any activity within the right-of-way requires some form of authorization from the road authority. Typically, this is done through a Road Construction Permit or Road Access Permit as defined and regulated by Ordinances 91-6, 96-6, and 2006-4, or a Road Event Permit, as defined and regulated by Ordinance 2008-1. However, these do not seem to fit the purpose in this case.

This specific request is unique in that it is temporary, but ongoing for a period of months and is not a typical road event like a foot or bike race, which generally allows joint use by the event and other road users. Also, the extensive parking areas have been in existence for a long time, and can typically be used at any time without control (which is proposed to continue when the checkpoint is not operating).

ORS 801.305 defines any road open to the public as a highway for purposes of the vehicle code. The Board is the road authority for all non-state highways outside the boundaries of an incorporated city. (ORS 810.010(2)). Road authorities have broad discretion to impose restrictions on sections of its own highways where deemed necessary to protect the roadway or the interests and safety of the general public. (ORS 810.030). These restrictions can be imposed by an order of the road authority and take effect upon posting of the impacted section of the road. (ORS 810.030(3)). Once posted, violation of those limits is a Class D traffic violation. (ORS 818.130(5)).

Recommendation

It is the Public Works Director's recommendation have the Board adopt an order that, in order to travel Reeder Road beyond Rentenaar Road on Saturdays, Sundays and state holidays between the last Monday of June and first Monday of September, an ODFW parking permit and entry pass is required. Vehicles would be required show their permit and pass at the ODFW checkpoint. The order would take effect upon ODFW posting signs on Reeder Road at the intersection with Rentenaar Road, and at the end of Reeder Road to the north. The Board Order could require specific conditions including requisite insurance and indemnities.

Because of the unique nature of this request, staff is asking the Board to review it and provide concurrence and direction to proceed or provide some other direction that the Board sees fit.

ODFW staff will be joining County staff at the meeting scheduled for this item to provide more information and provide the Board with a full discussion on the matter.