A SWIMMING CHANCE FOR FISH ON THE CROOKED RIVER

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Federally protected salmon and steelhead returning to the Deschutes basin will have one less obstacle to survival thanks to a new fish passage project on the lower Crooked River. Work is set to begin in early summer on a 28-foot fish ladder on the lower Crooked River at Opal Springs Dam, allowing salmon and steelhead as well as resident trout to move freely between the Crooked River and Lake Billy Chinook.

For returning salmon and steelhead who begin arriving in early fall, the fish ladder will add 120-miles of spawning and rearing habitat in the Crooked River and its tributaries. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist Brett Hodgson said that he and other fish managers have noticed many returning salmon and steelhead are swimming up the Crooked River only to have their journey cut short. Adding a fish ladder will allow these migrating salmon and steelhead to follow their natural instincts.

“We are confident that we will see natural reproduction and eventually a self-sustaining population once these fish establish themselves in the Crooked River,” said Hodgson.

The project, which is expected to be completed in fall 2019, is a long time coming for fish and fish advocates, due in part to the high price tag. The final project cost is expected to exceed $10 million, with a large portion of that coming from the Deschutes Valley Water District, which operates the dam at Opal Springs.