



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Sauvie Island Wildlife Area is a popular destination, especially on hot summer weekends, because of the combination of publicly accessible beaches with close proximity to Portland. As a result, the number of visitors often exceeds the parking and road capacity. This leads to traffic jams, unsafe parking practices, and impedes or prevents access for emergency vehicles. These issues have been ongoing for many years and have created safety concerns for both visitors and local authorities. To address this, the department is proposing a new parking permit specifically for three beaches on Sauvie Island that ODFW manages – Walton Beach, Collins Beach and North Unit Beach – collectively referred to in this summary as “Sauvie Island Beaches”.

A new parking permit system would apply specifically to Sauvie Island Beaches during the summer period. This idea builds on the successful results of a trial program conducted in 2025 and detailed studies about the area’s needs. The goal is to help manage the flow of visitors, reduce dangerous parking behaviors, and make the beaches safer and more enjoyable for everyone.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

While developing the new parking permit plan for Sauvie Island Beaches, staff from the ODFW made sure to involve the local community and key partners. They reached out to important groups and individuals, including Sauvie Island landowner Keely Nudo, the Sauvie Island Fire District, and the Columbia County Sheriff’s Department, all of whom sent official letters supporting the changes. ODFW staff also explained the project at three public meetings held by the Columbia County Board of Commissioners. On March 11, 2026, the Board voted to officially support ODFW’s continued efforts to manage busy summer traffic on Reeder Road.

After trying a new parking system during the summer of 2025, ODFW received many electronic and verbal comments from the public. To more formally assess customer opinion, ODFW asked beach visitors to complete a satisfaction survey after the season. The feedback from the survey was positive and is summarized in Attachment 4.

Members of the public have also had the opportunity to provide testimony at previous Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings.

The public has been invited to learn about the proposed rule changes on the Department’s website and share their thoughts online. Anyone interested can also give feedback during an upcoming commission meeting.

ISSUE 1

Modify existing Oregon Administrative Rules and institute a new seasonal Sauvie Island Beaches Permit to improve safety, visitor experience, and provide resource protection.

ANALYSIS

In response to numerous incidents and complaints, the department contracted with an outside consulting firm, David Evans and Associates, to document the issues at Sauvie Island Beaches and develop recommendations for addressing those issues. Their study (Attachment 5) found that on busy summer days, the number of cars trying to park at the beaches is much higher than the area can handle—sometimes by as much as 82%. This causes people to park illegally, block traffic lanes, and potentially prevent emergency responders from reaching people in need. The study recommended a mix of new rules and infrastructure improvements to help manage the situation.

In response, ODFW tested a new system during summer 2025. On weekends and holidays, visitors needed a free, date-specific "Beaches Pass" to park at Sauvie Island Beaches. Entry was controlled through a checkpoint staffed by ODFW and traffic management professionals. Staff tracked parking in real time and stopped issuing additional beach passes once spaces became limited, which helped keep the roads clear for emergency vehicles and reduced traffic jams. Surveys from visitors showed they appreciated the smoother traffic and less crowded beaches, though many found it confusing to need both a Beaches Pass and a separate Wildlife Area Parking Permit.

For the upcoming summer, ODFW plans to improve this system by combining the permit and the pass into a single Sauvie Island Beaches Parking Permit in response to feedback from customer surveys. Visitors will need this new permit to park at Walton, Collins, and North Unit beaches between June 15th and Labor Day. A checkpoint on Reeder Road will control entry (Attachment 6), and the number of daily permits will be limited to prevent overcrowding on weekends and holidays. The Sauvie Island Beaches Parking Permit limits restrictions for visitors who already hold an annual Wildlife Area Parking Permit, which remains valid for the rest of the wildlife area and for beach access outside the summer season.

Some local businesses have raised concerns about the pilot in 2025 and proposed permanent change as it will likely reduce visitor numbers. Additionally, some visitors were frustrated by the process or by being turned away on peak days. However, overall customer satisfaction with the pilot program was high, and many community members and organizations support the proposed changes. The Columbia County Board of Commissioners passed an order supporting ODFW's continued traffic management (Attachment 7). The Sauvie Island Fire District, Columbia County Sheriff's Office, and residents have also expressed their support. With this combined community support and ODFW's research, there is a strong case for adopting the new rule to improve safety and the visitor experience at Sauvie Island Beaches.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt amendments to OAR 653-008-0053 and 635-008-0147 as proposed by staff in Attachment 3 to institute a seasonal Sauvie Island Beaches Parking Permit.
2. Modify the staff proposal.
3. No action.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: ISSUE 1

Adopt amendments to OAR 653-008-0053 and 635-008-0147 as proposed by staff in Attachment 3 to institute a seasonal Sauvie Island Beaches Parking Permit.

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to adopt amendments to OAR 653-008-0053 and 635-008-0147 as proposed by staff in Attachment 3.

Effective Date: *Upon Filing*