

Sauvie Island Parking Pilot Summary



Contents

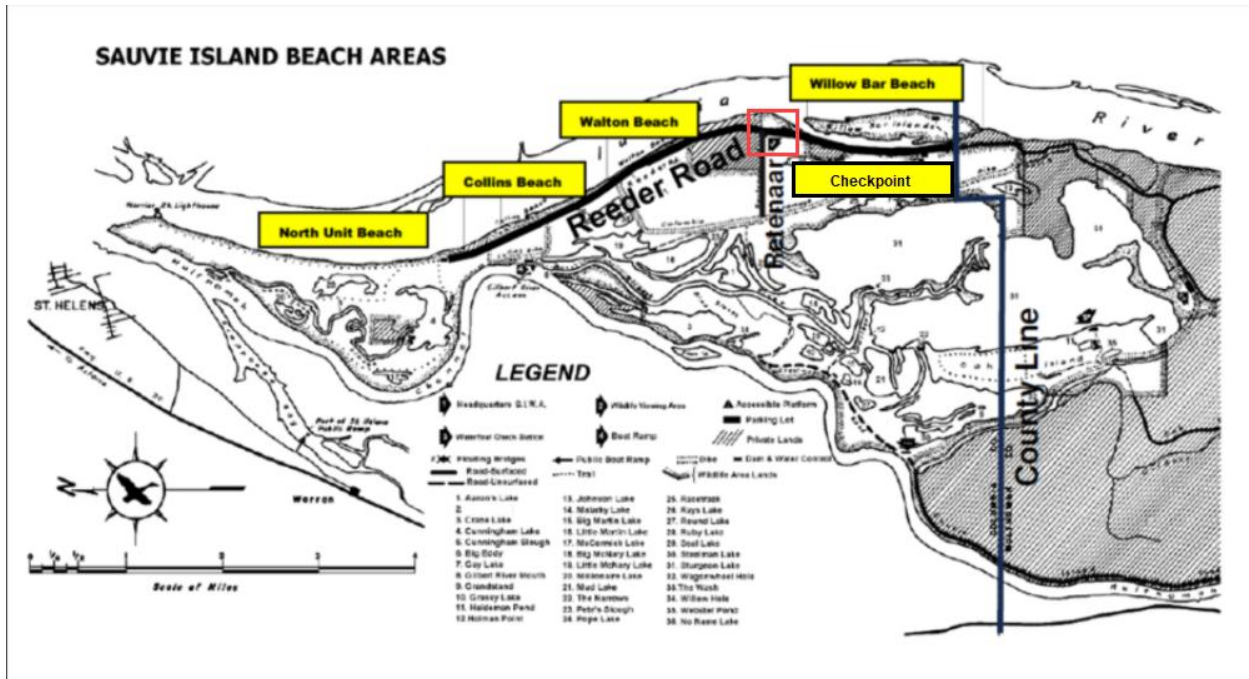
Executive Summary	1
2025 Pilot Program.....	2
Columbia County	3
Pilot Program Budget	4
Staff Investment	3
Customer Survey.....	5
Traffic Data.....	6
Customer Behavior	10
Lessons Learned	11
Recommendations	12

Executive Summary

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) implemented a pilot parking management program at Sauvie Island Wildlife Area (SIWA) beaches during summer 2025 to address overcrowding, improve safety, and protect wildlife habitat. The program required a free, date-specific Sauvie Island Beaches Pass on weekends and holidays, enforced through a staffed checkpoint on Reeder Road. The initiative was supported by Columbia County and executed in partnership with an event management vendor.

The program successfully reduced peak traffic volumes, maintained emergency access, and improved the visitor experience. Traffic data confirmed a significant reduction in weekend beach traffic compared to previous years, even on days when the checkpoint remained open. Survey feedback from beachgoers was largely positive, though some confusion arose around the dual permit/pass requirement and limited cell service.

Lessons learned highlighted the importance of clear communication, streamlined permitting, and improved technology infrastructure. The program was well-received by law enforcement and county officials, and it demonstrated a viable model for managing seasonal beach access.



2025 Pilot Program



In summer 2025, ODFW implemented a temporary rule requiring a free, date-specific Sauvie Island Beaches Pass on weekends and holidays (July 4 – Sept 1) to manage overcrowding and safety risks at the beaches. A traffic control plan, approved by Columbia County, supported this effort with checkpoint staffing, signage, and emergency access protocols on Reeder Road. An event management vendor was hired to staff the checkpoint, along with additional staff support by ODFW employees.

On each day that a pass was required, a limited number were made available through the Electronic Licensing System (ELS). Based on staff monitoring traffic arrivals and departures and a review of current available parking spaces, the number of passes was gradually increased or stopped and allowed to sell out. The system was only allowed to sell out twice during the summer on 7/13 and 8/10. In both cases there was still significant parking at Collins, but parking was all but full at Walton with hundreds of passes unaccounted for. Once sold out, visitors who had not yet obtained their pass were turned away at the checkpoint.

Columbia County

Reeder Road is a County Road managed by both Multnomah and Columbia Counties within each of their respective jurisdictions. The portion of the road that directly connects with ODFW ownership along the Sauvie Island Beaches is owned and managed by Columbia County. To implement the Sauvie Beaches Pilot Program ODFW needed to acquire a Columbia County Construction Permit to control traffic on Reeder Road. As part of this process ODFW reached out to the Columbia County Sherriff's Department and gained support for the project and presented our proposed plan to the Board of County Commissioners. The Board approved the plan and issued a Board Order to the Roads Department to evaluate our proposal. ODFW worked with David Evans and Associates (DEA) to finalize a traffic management plan and submitted for review to Columbia County Roads. Columbia County Roads quickly approved the plan and provided ODFW with the needed Construction and Traffic control permit. Columbia County's Sherrif, Roads Department, and Board of Commissioners have been excellent partners on this project and expedited every part of this process.

As this project moves forward it will require close annual collaboration with Columbia County to acquire the needed Construction Permit to control traffic. A long-term alternative could be ODFW acquisition of Reeder Road past Rentenaar Road, but that would come with significant maintenance responsibilities. The Columbia County Sherrif also proposed possible contracting with a deputy for enforcement on the Beach and other County uses during the off-season.

Staff Investment



Managing thousands of vehicles and the conflict associated with adoption of the new pass required a large investment in staff time. Personnel costs were the largest single expense in the budget (\$100,703.14). Staffing varied from six vendors and one ODFW supervisor on cool days expected to have low traffic turnout to eight ODFW staff, eight vendors, and three

OSP officers on hot days with high traffic. The surge in staffing on hot days was needed to ensure that the checkpoint did not block traffic and create breaks from standing on asphalt with local temps likely over 100 F. ODFW staffing relied on permanent staff with full-time positions that generally do not include these duties in their position descriptions. Staff routinely delayed other tasks or sacrificed personal lives to help implement the program. The program will likely not be sustainable without additional ODFW season staff to help manage the vendors.

Pilot Program Budget

Expenditures	
Checkpoint Personal Services (ODFW)	\$ 51,086.64
Services and Supplies:	
Motor pool	\$ 457.30
Information cards	\$ 224.90
Reader Board Rentals	\$ 3,452.80
Traffic Signs and Checkpoint Supplies	\$ 6,063.11
Traffic Study (DEA)	\$ 7,538.76
Traffic Control Vendor Contract: Coast to Coast	\$ 49,616.50
Total Expenditures	\$ 118,440.01
Revenue	
ELS Revenue	\$ 82,465.51
Pre-paid Revenue	\$ 49,200.00
Total Revenue	\$ 131,665.51
Difference	\$ 13,225.50

Pilot Expenditures Detail

- Personal Services: ODFW staff time staffing checkpoint
- Services and Supplies: Billboards, signage, printed cards
- Traffic Study: Contract with David Evans and Associates to provide plan for checkpoint, parking areas, etc.
- Traffic Control Vendor: Contract with Coast to Coast Event Services to provide staffing for checkpoint (weekends and holidays)
- Ongoing maintenance costs of porta-potty, trash collection, etc are not included in the services and supplies above because they were already costs associated with the beaches prior to this pilot program.



Customer Survey

During the pilot season ODFW received a variety of comments from the public in person, by email, and through a website comment box. To more objectively assess customer satisfaction with the new program ODFW sent a survey to the 9,607 customers who had obtained a beach pass and had a valid email address. The survey had a 17.75% response rate and feedback was largely complimentary of the program.

“It was way smoother than I anticipated, and it resulted in finding parking at noon on a sunny Sunday on Collins! Amazing.”

“Customer service agents were quick on their feet, easy to communicate with, and efficiently moved us from queue to the parking area.”

“Loved having fewer vehicles to avoid parking challenges and traffic congestion.”

“I love this idea. Supports less crowds and chaos for the residents.”

Some common criticisms provided about the program were:

- Confusion over needing two passes (ODFW Parking Permit + Beaches Pass)
- Poor cell service and ELS website usability
- Lack of clear signage before arrival
- Frustration with long lines and lack of spontaneity for visiting the beach

Customer service experience at the checkpoint was broadly positive as well, with lower scores in technology support and information availability echoing the common criticisms around cell service and signage.

Please rate the customer service experience you had at the Sauvie Island Beaches checkpoint.				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Timeliness of service provided	50%	27%	12%	10%
Helpfulness of staff	55%	26%	12%	7%
Technology support by staff	44%	24%	18%	14%
Availability of information	37%	26%	19%	18%
Overall quality of service	46%	30%	13%	11%

Percentages exclude responses of “Don’t Know/Not Applicable”

Despite the technological frustrations shared in feedback, customers expressed a slight preference for a kiosk to scan their pass on future visits, with a strong preference overall for purchasing their pass in advance of their visit.

On your next summer visit to Sauvie Island Beaches, rank the following experiences in order of preference.	
	Score (out of 4)
Purchase in advance, scan at kiosk	3.05
Purchase in advance, show to attendant	2.81
No checkpoint or limitation	2.27
Purchase on arrival (risk of sell-out)	1.87

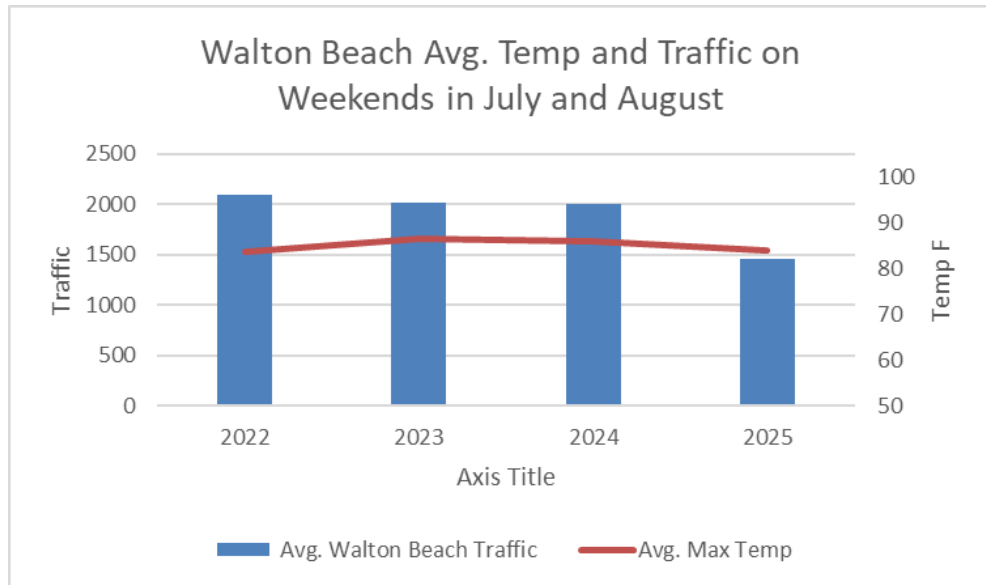
In terms of price, customers acknowledged in their feedback that fees are needed to support restroom maintenance, trash cleanup, habitat protection and staffing but they overwhelmingly preferred pricing at or near current amounts. Daily pricing of \$10-15 and annual pricing of \$30-\$50 was the comfort zone for the vast majority of customers.

Traffic Data

ODFW collects traffic data from counters on Reeder Road at Walton Beach and Willow Bar. To evaluate the effect of the Sauvie Beach Pass program on traffic, we downloaded data from both counters, filtered the data to include only weekends (Saturday and Sunday) in July and August, and compared traffic volume to temperature data from Portland, OR. We considered traffic data from 2022-2024 as baseline and compared it to observed changes in 2025. We limited our analysis to Walton Beach because it represented the vehicles that passed our check point. Numbers presented represent both traffic in and out and need to be divided by two to represent entering vehicles only.

Traffic flow past the checkpoint at Rentenaar Road was different in summer of 2025 than in recent years (2022-2024). 2025 experienced the lowest traffic to Sauvie Beaches in the last 4 years in both average and maximum daily traffic totals on weekends in July and August (Figures 1 and 2). The observed change in maximum traffic was expected because we stopped allowing more vehicles passed the checkpoint on the hottest and busiest days, which would naturally reduce traffic maximums. However, traffic was also lower on days when we did not close the checkpoint.

Figure 1. Walton Beach average daily traffic compared to the average temperature in Portland, OR on weekends in July and August 2022-2025.



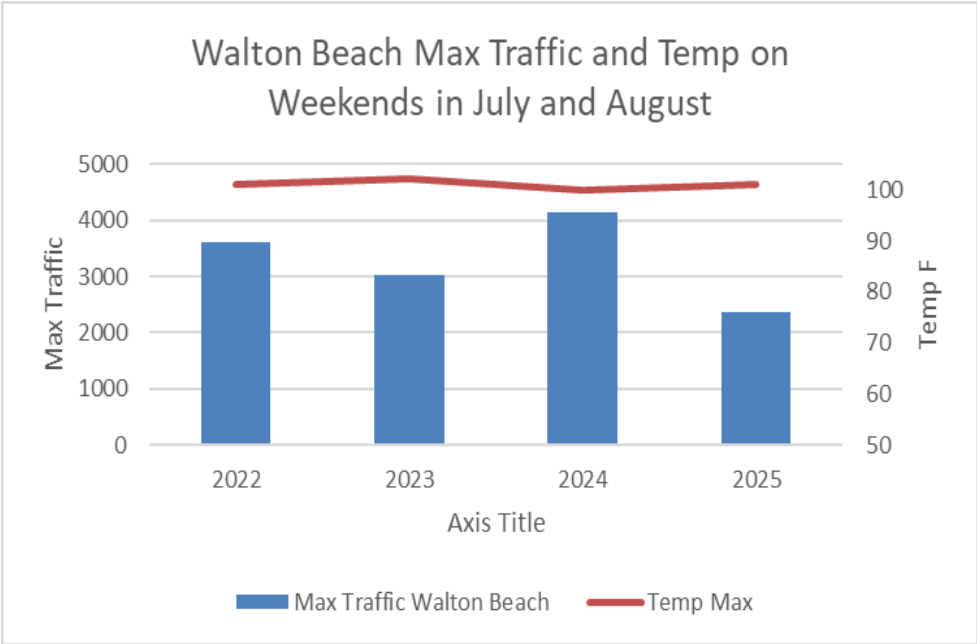


Figure 2. Walton Beach maximum daily traffic compared to the average temperature in Portland, OR on weekends in July and August 2022-2025.

This decline in beach use held true even after accounting for temperature differences between years (Figures 3 and 4). We cannot fully explain why traffic was lower on days when the checkpoint remained open to new passes, but possible explanations include enforcing the requirement to pay for the parking permit, hesitancy by some visitors to pass an official checkpoint, the perceived inconvenience of getting the pass, and/or uncertainty about the process.

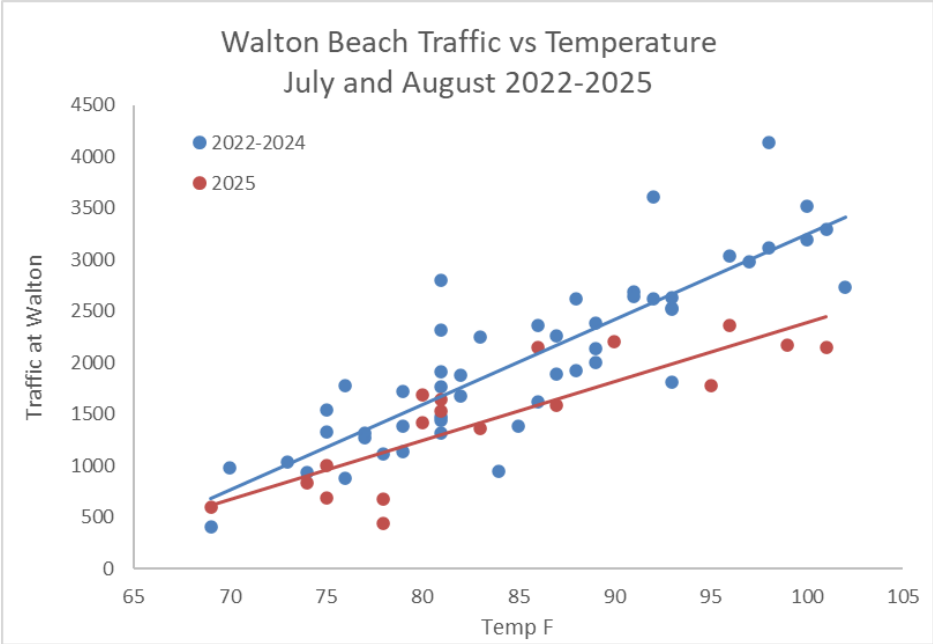
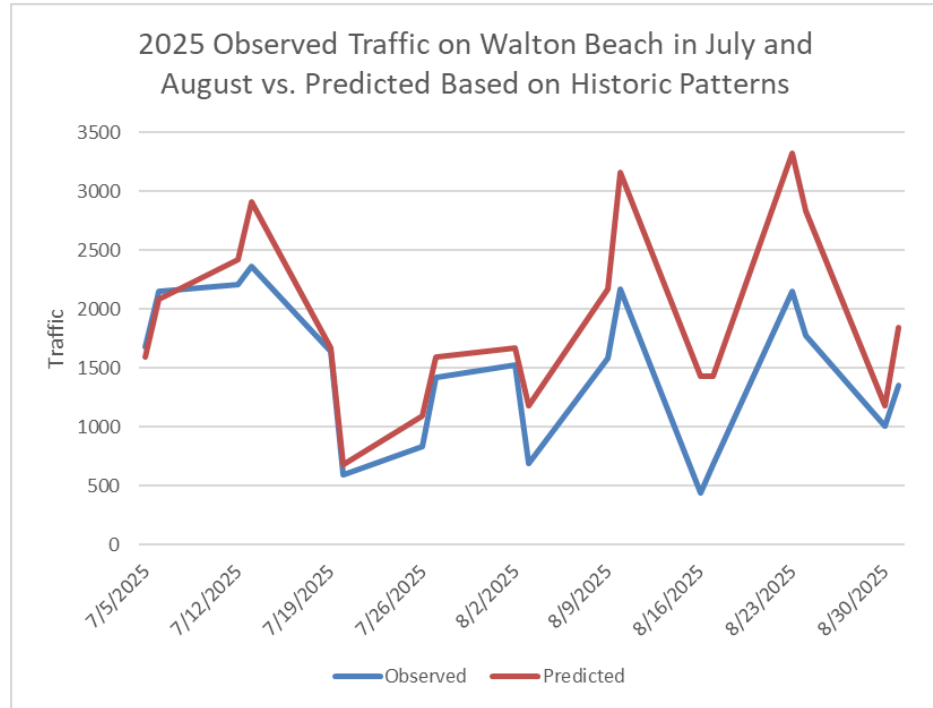
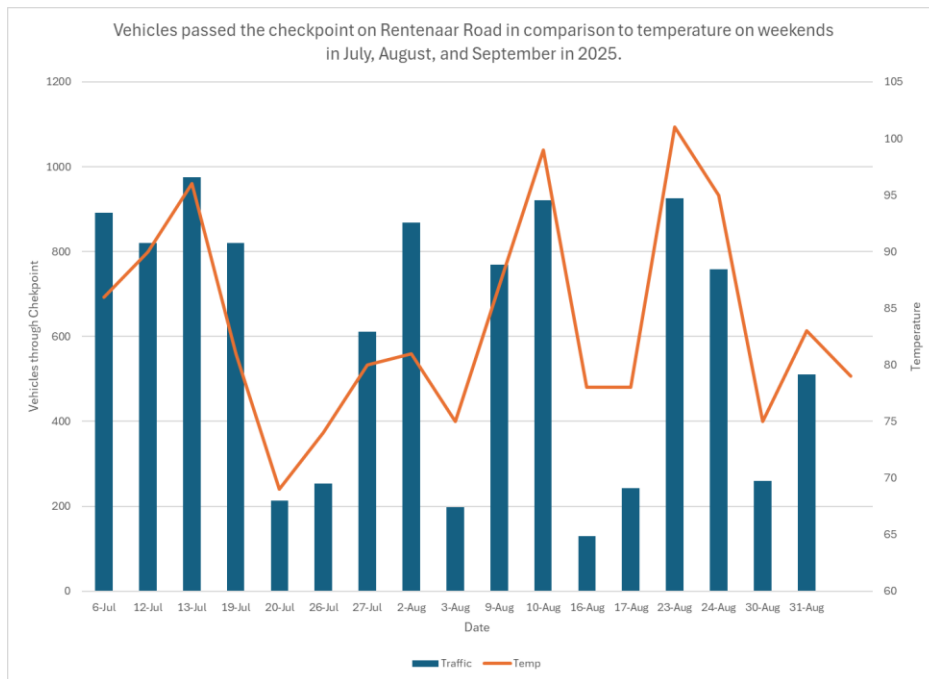


Figure 3. Comparison of maximum temperature in Portland, OR and daily traffic at Walton Beach on weekends in July and August in 2022-2024, and 2025.

Figure 4. Observed traffic at Walton Beach on weekends in July and August 2025 compared to predicted traffic based on historic patterns.



Contractor Coast to Coast Event Services reported the number of vehicles that passed the checkpoint by hour each weekend (Table 1). The data shows that vehicle traffic continued to be associated with temperature, however, the program successfully kept traffic below



1,000 vehicles on high temperature days, even when passes were still available. Traffic through the checkpoint was relatively slow in the morning but increased significantly by early afternoon, reaching a peak between around 13:00 and declining until close. A maximum flow of 298 vehicles an hour was reached around 13:00 on 8/2/2025.

Table 1. Vehicles passing the checkpoint on Rentenaar Road per hour as recorded by Coast to Coast Event Management during weekends in July, August, and Labor Day, 2025.

Time	Average Vehicles Per Hour	Max Vehicles Per Hour
7 AM	6	8
8 AM	9	16
9 AM	22	48
10 AM	50	119
11 AM	82	243
12 PM	101	200
1 PM	122	298
2 PM	88	170
3 PM	65	147
4 PM	59	166
5 PM	31	57

This data supports the conclusion that the Sauvie Island Beaches Pass program was successful in reducing peak traffic on weekends in the summer when compared to recent years and met the main program goal of keeping Reeder Road open to emergency vehicles and not exceeding available parking.

Customer Behavior

The following information derives from ELS sales data of the Sauvie Island Beaches Pass (“pass”) and Daily Wildlife Area Parking Permit.

- Most weekend visitors to the beaches only visited once in the summer
- Based on ZIP codes provided by customers, a large majority (75%) of beach visitors came from Multnomah and Washington counties, with the next highest portion coming from outside the state. While we don’t have non-Oregon county data, we can assume that most were from Clark and other nearby counties in Washington state.
- On any given day during the pilot season, up to 50-60% of customers bought the pass on the same day they intended to visit. The next highest percentage of customers bought the pass one day in advance.
- Most customers who bought a Daily Wildlife Area Parking Permit for a summer weekend signaled an intent to visit Sauvie Island Beaches. This is based on their answers to the standard ELS survey asking them to choose the Wildlife Area(s) where they plan to use the permit.

No. Unique Customers	Proportion who visited 1 day	Proportion who visited between 1 and 5 days	Proportion who visited more than 5 days
12,536	79%	18%	3%

Lessons Learned

Positive Experiences

- HQ and field staff worked well together; the SIWA team was praised for their dedication.
- Coast to Coast (C2C) was highly effective as the public-facing team and integrated well with ODFW staff.
- The traffic plan was successful, with no major backups and no complaints made to the County.
- Website, media, printed cards, and billboards were critical in helping visitors understand the pass requirement.
- Both Oregon State Police and Columbia County were pleased with the program
- Spanish-language materials and bilingual staff (e.g., Adriana) helped reach a broader audience.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Visitors were confused by needing both a permit and a pass. A single, unified product is preferred.
- Need to better define when to allow the system to sell out and how to manage the discrepancy between sales and parking availability.
- Pre-paid Permits created confusion and enforcement challenges, but are already phased out after 2025.
- Limited time for RFPs and contracts caused stress and near-failures.
- Weekend and hot weather work was taxing for staff and contractors.
- Poor cell service (especially T-Mobile) made it hard for visitors to access digital passes after arriving at the checkpoint.
- Posted ODFW signs and reader boards were unclear and difficult to update as changes happened. Look into acquiring cell based reader boards.
- Most retail vendors on the island did not assist customers in obtaining passes, largely because of their frustration with the pre-paid program ending.
- Some visitors obtained passes for everyone in the car, inflating numbers.
- Some visitors were confused by signage and thought they needed the pass throughout the week, not just on weekends.

Recommendations

- Update OAR to establish a daily Sauvie Island Beaches parking permit that is required to park in any of the beach parking areas, separating this parking area from the Statewide Wildlife Area Parking Permit program.
 - From the day after Labor Day to the day before Memorial Day, aka the off season, both the Wildlife Area Parking permit and the Sauvie Island Beaches parking permit are valid for parking in the beach areas. Only the new parking permit is valid for parking during the summer season.
 - The Gilbert River Boat Ramp parking area remains part of the Wildlife Area Parking Permit program, with either product valid for use in that area year round.
- Update the Electronic Licensing System to support a single product that has a per day quantity available, so that the parking pass purchase process is smoother for customers.
- Obtain approval from Columbia County for the traffic checkpoint to be established annually each summer on weekends and holidays.
 - The County Commissioner suggested that a cooperative agreement with ODFW and the County might be amenable if the Gilbert River Boat Ramp Agreement was revised to include funds lost from the Marine Board due to the increase in cost for the Wildlife Area Parking Permit.
 - Discuss with OSP the possibility of a Cooperative Enforcement Agreement with the Columbia County Sheriff Department.
- Continue to staff the checkpoint with event management contractors on weekends and holidays through the summer (Memorial Day – Labor Day).
- Hire two seasonal ODFW staff person(s) specifically assigned to oversee the program and work the weekend and holiday shifts. The weekend checkpoint will not be sustainable if dependent only on permanent ODFW staff.
 - Currently vacant seasonal positions or temporary positions could be leveraged for this work
- Update signs with information in both English and Spanish and with QR codes to purchase parking passes. Post signage year-round so visitors have advance notice.
- Upgrade reader boards to cellular so they can be updated remotely.

Additional Recommendations

- Improve the turnout area at the Reeder Road checkpoint for better traffic flow.
- Evaluate the feasibility of enhancing publicly accessible internet, such as Star Link, at the checkpoint

