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USACE Seattle District Praises Community Partners as Ballard Locks Fish Ladder Viewing Room Re-opens

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US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS SEATTLE DISTRICT

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PHOTO I

SEATTLE - Col. Alexander "Xander" L. Bullock commander of the Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, gives a ceremony Aug. 16, 2021, to commemorate the re-opening of the fish ladder viewing room at the Lake Washington Ship Canal and Hiram M. Chittenden Locks, known locally as the 'Ballard Locks' or 'Locks.' Bullock applauded the local community's power to rally together to pool resources to fund the renovation project and ensure natural resources for future generations.

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SEATTLE -- To commemorate the recent renovation of its fish ladder viewing room, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Seattle District held a ribbon cutting ceremony, Aug. 16, 2021, at Lake Washington Ship Canal and Hiram M. Chittenden Locks, known locally as the '[Ballard Locks](#)' or 'Locks.'

In his opening remarks, Colonel Alexander "Xander" L. Bullock, Seattle District commander, praised the power of non-profit organizations that pooled resources, and of private citizens who donated around \$1.2 million – the largest challenge partnership donation in USACE's history – toward the renovation project.

"In the very best tradition of American governance, we are a country founded on the idea that private citizens will take matters into their own hands. And that's exactly what you see here," Bullock said. "The citizens of this region have come together to fund this viewing room and drive forward a construction plan that would upgrade, beautify, and make this facility a fantastic place to visit," the commander added.

Renovating the viewing room was a combined effort of USACE, [The Corps Foundation](#) and [Discover Your Northwest](#), two non-profit organizations that support USACE-managed lakes, rivers and the lands surrounding them, and ensure public lands are places of education, recreation, and inspiration for all. The organizations have



Executive Director of Discover Your Northwest, Jim Adams, said the project had been in the works for more than 20 years, and was the biggest capital campaign his organization had been involved in. He said the project caught the attention of world-renowned architect Johnpaul Jones of Jones & Jones Architects, who volunteered to create the architectural design. Local experts in the construction field volunteered their expertise and resources; USACE provided labor, onsite construction support and design review.

"The commitment that the architects and contractors brought to this small job, was a testament to their belief in it," Adams said.

Fish ladders are usually located on freshwater rivers where dams and locks store water and obstruct fish passage, but the one at the Locks is unique, because it is one of the few fish ladders in the world located where saltwater and freshwater meet; ensuring salmon runs out of the Cedar River watershed and migration upstream to spawn.

Built in 1917, the original fish ladder consisted of 10 individual *weirs* or steps, a 2-foot differential between each weir. USACE's improvements to the fish ladder in 1976 included increasing the number of weirs to 21, decreasing the differential to one foot, adding an elongated 18th step and a tunnel adjoining the weirs, and creating the viewing room with a visitor exhibit gallery. However, it had been nearly 50 years since the facilities were built and exhibits were installed.

Rich Deline, director of The Corps Foundation, said the team agreed that renovating the fish ladder viewing room was a necessity because, "...the Locks was a Seattle icon, a navigational lock, a fish passage, and major metropolitan area." Renovations included improved gallery seating, display walls, and touchscreen monitors that show a series of short videos on the different salmon species. Touching the monitors allow tour guides to pause the videos, and switch to 'presentation mode,' to complete their tours.

In applauding the public's power to rally together to protect the environment and natural resources, Bullock said, "I am humbled by the generosity of citizens, who organized themselves into organizations, like The Corps Foundation and Discover Your Northwest, and donated significant amounts of funds, also raised by citizens, to create a place here so that our children, the youth of our country, our general citizens and visitors, can get a good understanding of how important the fish passage is, and how seriously the people of this region take the preservation and stewardship of the environment in the Pacific Northwest and the nation," the native of Snoqualmie, Washington, said.

The Locks is the busiest lock in the nation, passing 45,000 vessels annually. A favorite Seattle attraction, the Locks welcomes more than 1.5 million visitors each year, generating approximately \$1.2 billion in annual revenue, \$480 million in annual sales, and \$120 million in payroll. The Locks play an active role in developing the Seattle area by connecting Lake Washington to Salmon Bay and Puget Sound. Linking these bodies of water creates a navigational access to the region's valuable natural resources, like lumber and coal, and helps make Seattle a major world port.

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