

The Case Against Mass, Non-Routine Book Removal at the Salem Public Library
Seven Reasons Why the Book Removal Project Needs to End (Revised)
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1. The print collection at the Salem Public Library is not oversized. The Library's print collection per capita is *below* the median for Oregon public libraries serving populations greater than 25,000.

Library	Pop. Served	Print Items Per Capita in 2017-18
OREGON CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY	59,585	0.58
HERMISTON PUBLIC LIBRARY	25,752	1.20
DESCHUTES PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICT	182,930	1.26
HAPPY VALLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY	58,219	1.39
HILLSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY	154,197	1.52
SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY	60,655	1.65
SANDY PUBLIC LIBRARY	32,721	1.65
LEDDING LIBRARY	41,338	1.75
MULTNOMAH COUNTY LIBRARY	803,000	1.82
CLACKAMAS COUNTY LIBRARY	31,323	1.83
BEAVERTON CITY LIBRARY	145,118	1.90
SALEM PUBLIC LIBRARY	163,480	2.01
JACKSON COUNTY LIBRARY SERVICES	216,900	2.21
EUGENE PUBLIC LIBRARY	167,780	2.25
MCMINNVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY	33,665	2.25
FOREST GROVE CITY LIBRARY	29,129	2.33
HOOD RIVER COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT	25,145	2.49
TUALATIN PUBLIC LIBRARY	31,875	2.51
CEDAR MILL COMMUNITY LIBRARY	79,563	2.61
KLAMATH COUNTY LIBRARY SERVICE DISTRICT	67,690	2.64
WEST LINN PUBLIC LIBRARY	29,917	2.74
LAKE OSWEGO PUBLIC LIBRARY	42,386	2.78
TIGARD PUBLIC LIBRARY	64,089	2.86
ALBANY PUBLIC LIBRARY	52,710	2.91
CORVALLIS-BENTON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY	84,928	3.22
JOSEPHINE COMMUNITY LIBRARY DISTRICT	39,249	3.38
WILSONVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY	27,581	3.61
ONTARIO LIBRARY DISTRICT	26,645	4.28
TILLAMOOK COUNTY LIBRARY	26,175	5.46
MEDIAN		2.25

2. When compared to peer city libraries in Oregon, the print collection at Salem Public Library is only 17% larger, on average, and this can be at least partially explained by the fact that SPL is older (by decades in some cases) than other libraries except for Eugene's. If you add in e-books, SPL's collection is only 2% larger on average than its peers.

Library	Pop. served in 2017-18	Print Items in 2017-18	Percent more items at SPL
CORVALLIS-BENTON CO. PUBLIC LIBRARY	84,928	273,469	20%
BEAVERTON CITY LIBRARY	145,118	275,347	19%
HILLSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY	154,197	234,718	40%
SALEM PUBLIC LIBRARY	163,480	329,012	0%
EUGENE PUBLIC LIBRARY	167,780	377,001	-13%
AVERAGE			17%

3. Removal of books that are outdated, worn, and little used has been aggressively pursued by library management for at least the past five years. Since at least 2013, more books have been removed from the collection every year than have been added. A total of 217,647 books have been removed since 2013. The collection has 65,346 fewer books than it had in 2013.

Year	Total Print Items	Total Print Items Added	Total Print Items Discarded	Percentage Print Items Discarded
2012-13	394,358	28,706		
2013-14	370,522	29,158	52,994	13%
2014-15	360,969	29,306	38,859	10%
2015-16	341,088	31,160	51,041	14%
2016-17	337,373	31,678	35,393	10%
2017-18	329,012	30,999	39,360	12%
Total since 2013		152,301	217,647	

The *CREW** manual, that the Salem Public Library has adopted as its methodology for maintaining the collection, recommends that roughly the same number of books be discarded every year as are added. As the data shows, this guideline has been significantly exceeded every year in the past five years. The *CREW* manual also recommends that about 5% of the collection be discarded every year. In the past five years annual discards have averaged 12% of the print collection, more than double the recommendation of the *CREW* manual. Bottom line: our library print collection is a lean collection that has been well maintained in recent years such that a mass removal project now can only result in serious harm to the core collection of important and useful books that belong in the collection of a major urban library.

4. The Collection Development Policy approved by the Salem City Council calls for a broad and deep core collection of older and less frequently used books in addition to a "popular materials library" of more in-demand books. It calls for a "high quality collection" that reflects "the diversity of the community." It calls for "adequacy of coverage in [all] subject area[s]." It calls for a "varied and current collection covering a wide range of subjects and containing multiple points of view." The policy calls upon the library to "deliver the broadest possible access to content ...within ... the library's walls" and "to serve the Salem community by providing a broad choice of materials to meet informational, educational, cultural, and recreational needs." According to the policy, the collection will "embrace broad fields of knowledge with basic representative works in most subject areas." In summary, the policy affirms, "the Salem Public Library is committed to providing a broad and diverse collection." This describes the core collection today, but mass, non-routine removal of books, after five years which saw over 217,000 books removed, will seriously degrade the core collection, in violation of the Collection Development Policy.

5. It has been suggested that having a smaller, more "dynamic" print collection will lead to greater library use as measured by materials circulation. But the recent experience at Salem Public Library does not support this suggestion. After shrinking the print collection by over 65,000 items since 2013, circulation per capita has dropped from 8.32 in 2012-13 to 8.18 in 2017-18.

6. It has been asserted that greater use of CCRLS member libraries and greater use of interlibrary loan can mitigate the removal of a large portion of the core collection of older and less used books at Salem Public Library. But the average-sized print collection at CCRLS public libraries is only 42,000, only about one-eighth the size of the collection at SPL. The CCRLS public libraries are, for the most part, "popular materials libraries" without significant core collections because of space and budget limitations. They will not provide an adequate substitute for the core collection at Salem Public Library. And interlibrary loan is staff-intensive, costly and slow. That is why in 2017-18 interlibrary loans at SPL were only 0.1% of total circulation (1,334). Many studies have shown that the cost of interlibrary loan can be the about same as purchasing the book that is being sought. In addition, SPL currently charges for interlibrary loans, which is a disincentive to its use.

7. It has been asserted that the Salem Public Library will need to have a much smaller print collection when the upcoming renovation project is completed. The project will replace the current book shelving with lower, more earthquake-safe shelving and the book capacity at the library will be decreased. This assertion is presumptive and premature. Book capacity at the renovated library is a matter for a professional library architectural design team to determine in consultation with library stakeholders. This determination is months away. Library architects have many creative ways to accommodate the needs of the communities they serve, including the continuation of a strong core collection at the Salem Public Library in accordance with the Collection Development Policy.

Conclusion: There is no convincing evidence to support the need for mass, non-routine removal of books from the print collection at the Salem Public Library. The collection is not oversized and it has been well-maintained in recent years. Mass, non-routine removal of books is not consistent with the recently-adopted Collection Development Policy that calls for both a collection of current popular high-demand books and a core collection of older, less frequently used books that nonetheless provide for a "broad and diverse collection." Having a smaller print collection will not lead to improvements in library circulation, as evidenced by SPL data from the past five years. Borrowing books from other CCRLS libraries or the use of interlibrary will be a poor substitute for just maintaining the core collection that dedicated librarians have built and that Salem taxpayers have paid for. Finally, library managers are not architects, and they should not make assumptions in advance about the design capacity of the renovated Salem Public Library.

Source Note: All data in this paper comes from the State Library of Oregon:
<https://www.oregon.gov/Library/libraries/Pages/Statistics.aspx>

* <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ld/pubs/crew/index.html> (p. 17)