



Fifty years from now, our vision is to see, “Everywhere in our State, ...healthy waters, able to sustain a healthy economy, environment, and cultures & communities.”

~ Policy Advisory Group (2010)

The fundamental purpose of this document is to understand Oregon’s water needs and to articulate a strategy to meet those needs into the future. Although the Integrated Water Resources Strategy is ambitious (there are not currently enough resources to fully implement all of the actions listed here), the intent of the Strategy is to provide a blueprint for future actions.

Water is one of the world’s most precious natural resources. With more than 100,000 miles of rivers and streams, 360 miles of coastline, and more than 1,400 named lakes, Oregon is renowned for its water. Our rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands, springs, and aquifers provide a wide range of benefits to all Oregonians.

This clean and reliable source of water is essential for meeting our basic human needs, and for supporting Oregon’s economy—the thousands of businesses and industries that rely upon water in some form, to irrigate a crop, to manufacture a product, or to provide a service or experience.

Oregon’s economy, in turn, is dependent upon a healthy environment where water resources play an essential part. Fish and wildlife need a sufficient quantity and quality of water—from the rivers, lakes, wetlands, and estuaries—to live, reproduce, and thrive. A healthy environment includes fully functioning ecosystems that are able to support our commercial and recreational needs and a quality of life unique to Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

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Building a Water Strategy for Oregon

In order to achieve Oregon’s vision for water, a strategy was developed that brings various sectors and interests together to work toward the common purpose of maintaining healthy water resources to meet the needs of Oregonians and Oregon’s environment for generations to come.

With leadership, support, and direction from the State Legislature and the Water Resources Commission, Oregon’s natural resource agencies set out to develop a statewide, integrated water resources strategy to meet current and future water needs.

Unlike traditional water supply plans, this Strategy considers instream needs (where water remains in the environment) along with out-of-stream needs (where water is diverted for use), including water quality, water quantity, and ecosystem needs.

The Oregon Water Resources Department, the state agency responsible for water quantity, took the lead to develop this Strategy. The Department worked closely with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to ensure that water quality needs and ecological needs were directly addressed. The Oregon Department of Agriculture, which oversees the safety and promotion of Oregon agriculture, also played an important role in the development of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy.

A “Bottom-Up” Approach

Oregon’s first integrated water resources strategy, although led by state agencies, was built from the ground up. Early on, the four state agencies actively sought input from the public, hosting discussions in eleven Oregon communities all across the state. Stakeholders and several water-related organizations also participated in individual workshop discussions.

The public input gathered from these discussions resulted in an extensive list of water-related challenges that Oregonians care passionately about and want to see addressed in the state’s first water strategy. From the very beginning, Oregonians offered a variety of solutions and ways the State could move forward to improve water resources management in Oregon.

Conversations continued with formal advisory groups that offered advice on the most critical issues to address and the most promising solutions.

More than fifteen natural resource and economic development state agencies and ten federal agencies with diverse responsibilities in the areas of water supply, water quality, land management, and fish and wildlife management in Oregon, provided assistance and feedback during development of the Strategy. These agencies were instrumental in helping to identify the successful tools, plans, and programs already in place today that can be built upon or further integrated under the umbrella of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy.

In any public outreach effort, it is very challenging to reach every citizen of the state. An 18-member advisory group of citizens and stakeholders was formed to help achieve a diverse range of perspectives and interests, and to help speak on behalf of all Oregonians. Like the state and federal agencies, their feedback and recommendations were invaluable for developing the structure and content of the Strategy.

The comments, feedback and input received throughout the development of the Strategy were shared regularly with the Water Resources Commission, other boards and commissions, the Oregon State Legislature, and the Governor's Office.

After more than three years of engagement with Oregon's citizens, the Water Resources Commission formally adopted Oregon's first Integrated Water Resources Strategy the second day of August 2012, with implementation beginning immediately.

Founded in Law

Successful long-term investment in Oregon's economy and environment requires a foundation of certainty and law, and this Strategy upholds the rule of law and the long-standing history that supports it.

This Strategy places an emphasis on collaboration and voluntary efforts. It identifies areas where incentives, whether financial, technical, or policy in nature, could serve as powerful tools for progress. It also identifies where public and private partnerships could stretch our dollars and further our instream and out-of-stream goals. Just as importantly, the Strategy is *not* intended to remove or jeopardize existing water rights or other local, state, and federal authorizations. The Strategy does not relinquish any existing authorities.

Finding Your Way Around the Document

This document is organized in a way that supports the authorizing language of HB 3369 (now ORS 536.220). In its deliberations over House Bill 3369 in 2009, Oregon's Legislature posed two questions essential to Oregon's future: what is the current state of Oregon's water supply relative to its needs, and what must Oregon do to ensure that sustainable supplies of clean and abundant water are available to meet future instream and out-of-stream needs?

Organization

Recommended actions described in each section focus on improving, modernizing, and expanding Oregon's foundation of data and programs. The conclusion presents a long-term blueprint—an overview of “next steps”—for the State of Oregon to follow in order to understand and meet its water needs. The conclusion is presented in the context of efforts already underway, as well as additional work needed in short-term (the next five years) and the long-term.

The Strategy is organized around four main objectives, which are presented as chapters, and within each chapter, sections highlight the critical issues and recommended actions needed to address those issues.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Four cross-cutting issues are of vital importance to Oregon's water future: groundwater, climate change, funding, and institutional coordination. These four issues are present or implied in every section of this Strategy. An overview of each follows.

Groundwater: Oregon monitors and manages groundwater at the state level (unlike several other western states). This approach enables the State to track groundwater availability and groundwater quality, manage surface water and groundwater conjunctively, make science-based permitting decisions, and to provide information to local planners and other decision-makers. Unfortunately, groundwater science, so critical to economic and environmental decision-making, has been given short shrift in public and private

budgets during recent decades, causing significant knowledge gaps at local, state, and federal levels. Major groundwater-related items are found in several of the recommended actions.

Climate Change: The authorizing language of ORS 536.220 highlights climate change in several instances. It calls for recommendations regarding continuous monitoring of climate change effects on Oregon’s water supply, and for recommendations regarding the water user actions that are necessary to address climate change. Climate change actions will draw upon a suite of tools and approaches, including increasing water conservation and efficiency efforts, expanding natural and built storage, and strengthening the resiliency of riparian areas, forest lands, wetlands, and floodplains.

Adaptation to climate change requires a closer look at how it may affect water rights, crop production, and migration patterns. You can find several recommended actions that relate to climate change throughout the document.

Funding: Much of the content in this Strategy focuses on policy and administration, however, implementation cannot occur without investing the time, energy, and expertise in these areas. Today, the agencies that protect and manage Oregon’s natural resources receive less than one-percent of the General Fund. Water management receives an even thinner slice of that investment.

An analysis of budgets in other western states reveals millions—if not billions—of dollars dedicated to the development and protection of water resources. These are orders of magnitude beyond what Oregon historically has spent in support of its most precious natural resource. The Strategy specifically focuses on funding for work at the state and local level, but all of the recommended actions contain a funding component.

Institutional Coordination: No entity is an island when it comes to water management. In Oregon, all water is publicly owned, and there are a multitude of public and private organizations with specific responsibilities and authorities related to the management of Oregon’s water resources.

These organizations reside at the local, state, tribal, and federal level and each has a different mandate, funding base, and constituency. There are many ways these organizations can more efficiently communicate, pay for, and implement their planning and policy development, from data collection to project implementation. You can find recommended actions focused on institutional collaboration and coordination throughout the Integrated Water Resources Strategy.

Oregon’s Water Strategy for the Future: Four Primary Objectives

Oregon’s Integrated Water Resources Strategy provides a blueprint to help the state better understand and meet its instream and out-of-stream water needs, taking into account water quantity, water quality, and ecosystem needs. It consists of four primary objectives, followed by critical issues with more detail, and thirteen sets of recommended actions.

The Four Primary Objectives:

OBJECTIVE 1

Understand Oregon’s
Water Resources Today

Oregon needs to fill the knowledge gap—gathering, processing, and sharing water resources information, so that the State can better characterize its water resources to sustain Oregon’s jobs and the economy, as well as a healthy environment.

OBJECTIVE 2
Understand Instream
and Out-of-Stream Needs

Oregon needs a better grasp of current and future needs—both instream and out-of-stream. Without a better characterization of current water use and future water quantity, water quality, and ecosystem needs, the State cannot adequately plan to meet these needs into the future.

OBJECTIVE 3
Understand the Coming Pressures
that Affect Our Needs and Supplies

Oregon must anticipate and model some of the most powerful changes that may affect both water resources and water needs into the future. Such changes include climate change, population growth and shifts, economic development, changes in land use, infrastructure needs, the water-energy nexus, and the need for water-related education.

OBJECTIVE 4
Meet Oregon’s Instream
and Out-of-Stream Needs

Oregon needs to integrate and coordinate both the long-term planning and day-to-day management of Oregon’s water resources among local, state, federal, and tribal governments, as well as with other state partners. Key actions here include state-level and place-based planning, water management and development, protection of public health and ecological health, and stable funding.