

Photo: Susan Douthit, OWRD



Lava Camp Lake near the Pacific Crest Trail

Oregon’s Integrated Water Resources Strategy contains a number of recommended actions, which taken together, provide a blueprint for the State of Oregon to follow in order to understand and meet its instream and out-of-stream water needs. The reality of our national, state, and local economic situation means that implementation of these Recommended Actions may not be as robust or aggressive as desired.

However, the current economy cannot curb Oregon’s commitment to meeting current and future water needs, which include economic growth and environmental protection. Oregon’s goal is to secure successful outcomes in both of these areas, and the Integrated Water Resources Strategy offers a series of “next steps” to get us there.

This Strategy offers an opportunity to take a long-term approach to water resources management, enumerating next steps according to five- and ten-year outcomes.

<p>Five-Year Outcome (2012-2017)</p>	<p>Provide essential services and conduct in-basin work, improving Oregon’s ability to understand and meet its water needs.</p>
<p>Ten-Year Outcome (2017-2022)</p>	<p>Strengthen essential services and in-basin work, positioning Oregon to address emerging issues that affect our water needs and supplies.</p>

The “Next Steps,” enumerated here, require attention during the implementation phase (2012-17). Some steps are already underway, either as part of ongoing efforts, or because they do not require additional funding or authorizations from the Oregon Legislature. Some steps require assistance from the Oregon Legislature, which meets next in 2013. Other steps have been deferred until 2015, in order to implement the Integrated Water Resources Strategy in stages.

A more detailed workplan, with more information about the likely lead agency, staffing, and budget requirements, will emerge over the next several months. Such a workplan will require regular updates in order to reflect actions the Oregon Legislature, state agencies, and other partners have taken in support of the Strategy.

How Oregon goes about implementing these steps is important as well. The State has made commitments on a number of fronts, including accountability, a balanced approach, collaboration, an open public process, reasonable cost, science-based approaches, streamlining, and other principles memorialized as part of the Strategy's development. Policy-makers responsible for implementation have a duty to conduct the next phase as carefully as they did in the development of the Strategy.

The guiding principles follow:

- *Accountable and Enforceable Actions:* Ensure that actions comply with existing water laws and policies. Actions should include better measurement and enforcement tools to ensure desired results.
- *Balance:* The Strategy must balance current and future instream and out-of-stream needs supplied by all water systems (above ground and below ground). Actions should consider and balance tradeoffs between ecosystem benefits and traditional management of water supplies.
- *Collaboration:* Support formation of regional, coordinated, and collaborative partnerships that include representatives of all levels of government, private and non-profit sectors, tribes, stakeholders, and the public. Collaborate in ways that help agencies cut across silos.
- *Conflict Resolution:* Be cognizant of and work to address longstanding conflicts.
- *Facilitation by the State:* The State should provide direction and maintain authority for local planning and implementation. Where appropriate, the State sets the framework, provides tools, and defines the direction.
- *Incentives:* Where appropriate, utilize incentive-based approaches. These could be funding, technical assistance, partnerships / shared resources, regulatory flexibility, or other incentives.
- *Implementation:* Actions should empower Oregonians to implement local solutions; recognize regional differences, while supporting the statewide strategy and resources. Take into account the success of existing plans, tools, data, and programs; do not lose commonsense approach; develop actions that are measurable, attainable, and effective.
- *Interconnection/Integration:* Recognize that many actions (e.g. land-use actions) in some way affect water resources (quality and/or quantity); recognize the relationship between water quantity and water quality; integrate participation of agencies and parties.
- *Public Process:* Employ an open, transparent process that fosters public participation and supports social equity, fairness, and environmental justice. Advocate for all Oregonians.
- *Reasonable Cost:* Weigh the cost of an approach with its benefits to determine whether one approach is better than another, or whether an approach is worth pursuing at all. Actions should focus on reducing the costs of delivering services to the state's residents, without neglecting social and environmental costs.
- *Science-based, Flexible Approaches:* Base decisions on best available science and local input. Employ an iterative process that includes "lessons learned" from the previous round. Establish a policy framework that is flexible. Build in mechanisms that allow for learning, adaptation, and innovative ideas or approaches.
- *Streamlining:* Streamline processes without circumventing the law or cutting corners. Avoid recommendations that are overly complicated, legalistic, or administrative.
- *Sustainability:* Ensure that actions sustain water resources by balancing the needs of Oregon's environment, economy, and communities.

Steps Already Underway

The implementation of a number of recommended actions has begun, with authorizations secured and funding already in place. Examples include the efforts to localize, or downscale, climate change data at the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute; these efforts are funded primarily by federal funds. Other information-related efforts include updated program materials, education and outreach at all age levels, and boat-inspection programs designed to find and eradicate invasive species.

Funding for water and wastewater related infrastructure is still available from Federal partners, although at declining rates. Funding for habitat restoration also continues via the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, with lottery funds as the source.

Work is scheduled to continue on the water quality and public health front, with continuation of programs at current funding levels to ensure drinking water safety, to reduce exposure to toxics, and to implement water quality pollution control plans.

Oregon now also has a modest track record in water supply development, with the establishment of the Umatilla Basin Aquifer Recovery Project. That project continues to develop into a commercially-sized application, and will likely continue to seek state investment as it grows to full build-out.

Next Steps Requiring Assistance from the Oregon Legislature in 2013

In order to position Oregon to better understand and meet its water needs now and into the future, the Integrated Water Resources Strategy makes a series of recommended actions that need assistance from the Oregon Legislature in the short term.

First, a better understanding of Oregon's physical water resources

This includes completion of additional groundwater basin studies that help us understand where Oregon's groundwater resources are located, their relationship to surface water ecosystems, and their sustainable yield. These efforts also include improved monitoring of groundwater, surface water, and habitat through improved instrumentation—additional dedicated monitoring wells and stream gages, the technical staff to operate the systems, and increased agency coordination.

Second, an improved understanding of Oregon's need for water

Recommended actions begin to close some fundamental gaps in our water rights system, such as authorizing the State to update the name on water right certificates, providing technical assistance to help customers with water-use measurement and reporting, and determining and protecting the flows needed to support instream needs.

Third, a better understanding of the coming pressures that affect our needs and supplies

Recommendations in this area place heavy emphasis on providing critical groundwater and climate change information to local communities and planners, so that they can understand how groundwater hydrology and potential changes in precipitation patterns may affect their access to and management of water.

Fourth, an improved ability to meet Oregon's current and future water resources needs

This includes developing tools so the State can partner with local communities to conduct place-based integrated, water resources planning. It also includes the authority and funding for the State to lead a more active water supply development program than in the past, notably in the purchase, conservation, storage, and development of water for both instream and out-of-stream purposes. It includes a variety of

traditional and non-traditional mechanisms to protect water quality, providing benefits to both public health and ecological health. Finally, the Strategy calls for stability and a renewed commitment to identifying funding sources that support Oregon's system of water resources management.

Next Steps Requiring Assistance from the Oregon Legislature in 2015

Not all of the Recommended Actions identified in the Integrated Water Resources Strategy are positioned for short-term implementation. Some requests will likely be deferred until the Oregon Legislature meets in 2015, because of interim steps planned in the meantime.

One example includes adjudication of pre-1909 claims. The Water Resources Department plans to complete its role in the Adjudication of the Klamath Basin by July 1, 2013. From there, the Department needs to work with stakeholders to develop a workplan to address the remaining un-adjudicated areas of the state.

By 2015, it will also be time to develop a new, long-range water demand forecast for the state. This will require a modest investment in technical studies.

Finally, by 2015, a significant amount of local, or downscaled, climate change data may be available to present to communities, so that they can build the results into their local efforts to plan their water future.

The next rendition of Oregon's Integrated Water Resources Strategy is due in 2017.