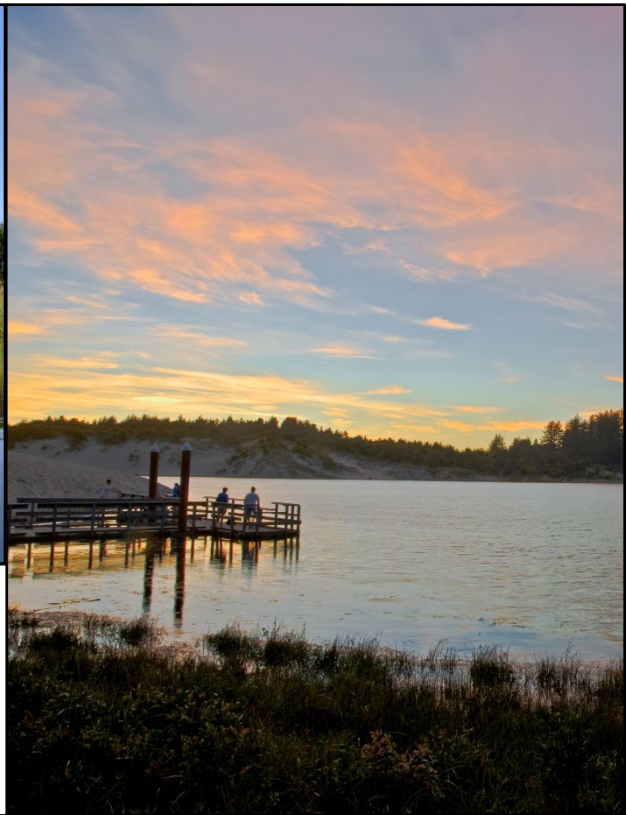




**Environmental Justice Council
Annual Report
2026
Oregon Parks and Recreation Department**



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Agency Introduction

Mission

The mission of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) is to provide and protect outstanding natural, scenic, cultural, historic and recreational sites for the enjoyment and education of present and future generations.

Vision

To take the long view to protect Oregon's special places and provide the greatest experience while creating stable future funding.

Leadership

- Stefanie Coons, Interim OPRD Director
- Executive Team (additional members):
 - Matt Rippee, Deputy Director of Field and Community Services
 - JR Collier, Interim Deputy Director of Business Administration
 - Dennis Comfort, Interim Deputy Director of Statewide Operations
 - Eric Timmons, Interim Coastal Region Director
 - Susan Bethers, Mountains Region Director
 - Guy Rodrigue, Valleys Region Director
 - Kristin Jones, Strategic Initiatives Director
 - Suzanne Harpell, Human Resources Director
- Governing Boards/Councils/Commissions
 - [Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission](#)
 - [All-Terrain Vehicle Advisory Committee](#)
 - [All-Terrain Vehicle Highway Access Routes Advisory Committee](#)
 - [Oregon Scenic Bikeways Committee](#)
 - [Oregon Recreation Trails Advisory Council](#)
 - [Oregon Outdoor Recreation Committee for Land and Water Conservation Funding](#)
 - [Outdoor Recreation Advisory Council](#)
 - [Local Government Grant Advisory Committee](#)
 - [County Parks Assistance Advisory Committee](#)

- [Recreation Trails Program](#)
- [Oregon Heritage Commission](#)
- [Commission on Historic Cemeteries](#)
- [State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation](#)
- [Historic Assessment Review Committee](#)
- Environmental Justice Related Staff Roles:
 - Allison Watson, Engagement Programs Manager
 - Kaileigh Westermann-Lewis, Belonging, Equity, and Engagement Coordinator
 - Helena Kesch, ADA & Tribal Relations Coordinator

Strategic Planning

OPRD completed its 2025–2027 Strategic Plan in June 2025. However, the agency acknowledges that the plan is still in development and remains committed to refining it in response to newly emerging needs and priorities. These revisions aim to ensure the plan remains responsive and is grounded in financial and operational realities.

Changes will include adding the agency’s Financial Foundation Initiative as a lens across all strategic goals in response to the financial deficit of \$7 million anticipated for the 2025 – 2027 biennium.

Importantly, the updated plan will also provide a more transparent view of the agency’s financial position and serve as a practical framework to guide decision-making. These changes reflect OPRD’s intent to use the strategic plan as a living tool, one that helps determine how, when, and why the agency acts in alignment with its mission and the needs of the communities it serves. The updated strategic plan is expected in early 2026.

While there will be changes in the plan’s approach to address these financial impacts, OPRD’s commitments to Belonging, Equity, & Engagement (BEE) as a key piece included in the Strategic Plan and the agency’s separate BEE plan, will continue. In response to upcoming changes for the Environmental Justice Council, the agency seeks to align the Environmental Justice Report with its Belonging, Equity, and Engagement Plan.

Budget Overview

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department operates without General Fund support for its core services. Instead, the agency relies on a combination of park visitor revenue, a share of recreational vehicle registration fees, grants, and constitutionally dedicated Oregon Lottery funds. These sources support the agency and its primary programs: the state park system, heritage programs, and community grant programs.

However, OPRD is currently facing a projected \$7 million budget shortfall for the 2025 - 2027 biennium. This shortfall is driven by compounding key factors:

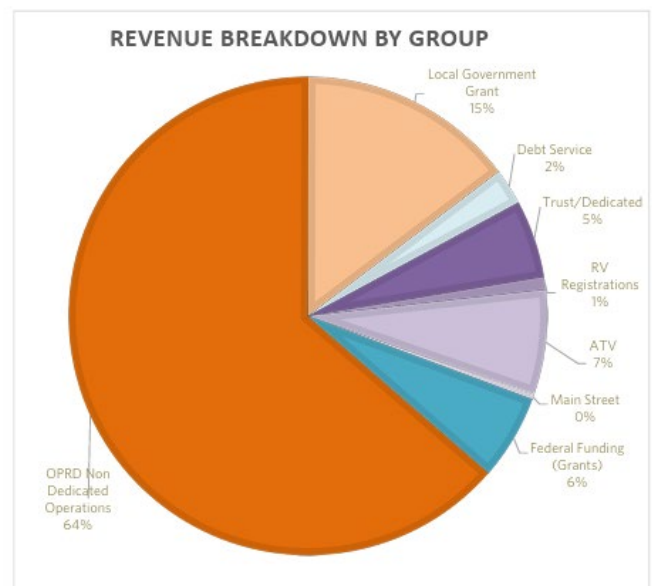
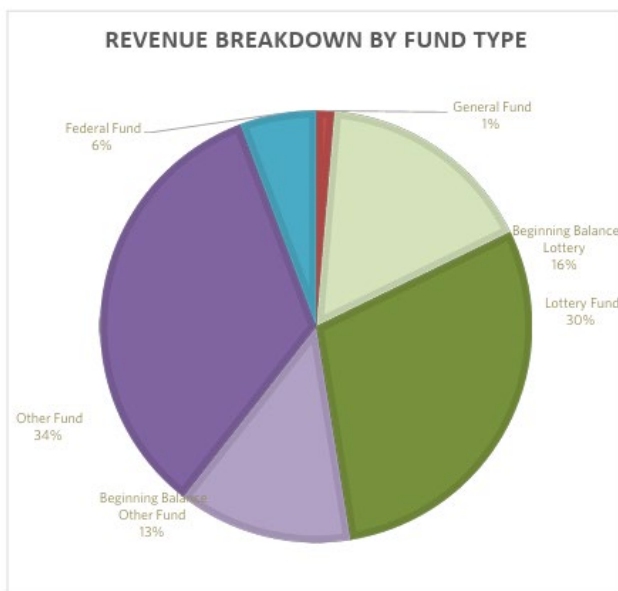
- Decreasing revenue from both visitor fees and Lottery allocations, which are expected to decline in the upcoming biennium.
- Rising operational and maintenance costs, particularly for aging infrastructure across the 250+ state park properties.
- A constitutionally triggered increase in Lottery Fund allocations to the Local Government Grants Program (LGGP) during the 2023 - 2025 biennium reduced available Lottery revenue for other agency expenses.

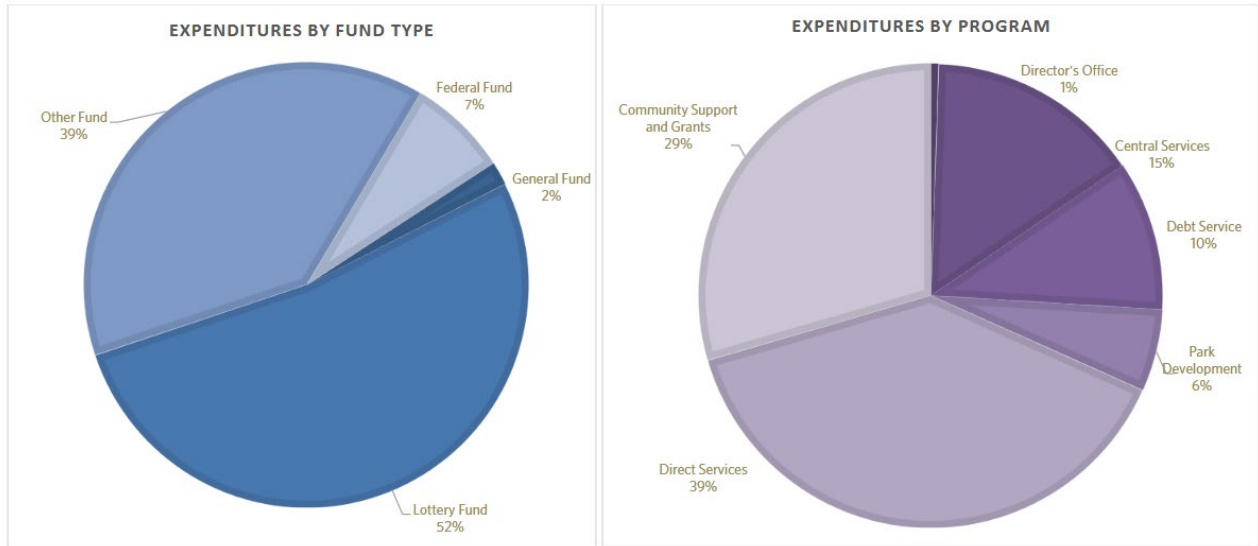
To address this gap, the agency is exploring a range of strategies, including:

- Implementing dynamic pricing models that adjust fees based on season and demand.
- Restricting cancellation refunds and modifying policies for no-shows.
- Revisiting rulemaking regarding special access passes.
- Postponing construction projects and reducing administrative costs.
- Expanding revenue-generating capacity by adding more cabins and yurts.
- Pursuing partnerships and sponsorships to build a more sustainable funding model.

As shared in the previous section, these financial realities are shaping the agency's strategic planning efforts.

2025 - 2027 Biennium:





[Review OPRD's 2025 – 2027 Legislatively Adopted Budget here.](#)

Public Participation Practices

Current Engagement Practices

Tribal Partnership & Engagement

In 2025, OPRD continues to engage with Tribal partners through two meeting groups: the Cultural Cluster and the Natural Resources Working group. These quarterly meetings are a place where OPRD is able to share upcoming projects, potential impacts, and receive feedback and requests directly from Tribal representatives. Following the agency's Tribal Relations Policy, in addition to maintaining a government to government relationship with the Tribes, OPRD encourages staff to take opportunities to engage in meaningful and positive relations with each of the Tribes as they work on programs and/or projects. Meaningful engagement includes consulting with partners in the early development phases of projects, considering resource impacts for Tribal partners that respects traditional cultural, religious, medicinal, ceremonial, and other customary cultural heritage use. An example of this collaboration includes standard practices to work with Tribes on natural resource work including prairie and meadow restoration, oak habitat restoration, dune and wetlands enhancement, riparian restoration, fire recovery, and forest management.

Beginning in 2024 and continuing in 2025, OPRD natural resources staff partnered with The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde to support access to first foods on OPRD-managed lands. This included establishing access to sites where Tribal members could harvest traditional first foods, as well as identifying opportunities for planting and cultivating these resources in collaboration with Tribal natural resource departments. The success of this effort was due in large part to the dedicated involvement of OPRD staff who initiated the partnership and explored opportunities for expansion at other properties. In addition to the coordination with

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, staff had initiated discussions on how to expand this effort with other tribal partners, including The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, and The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Unfortunately, due to financial realignment in response to the agency's projected deficit, the staff position that led and sustained this work was eliminated. At this time, coordination with Tribes for this program has ceased.

Engagement with Underrepresented Communities

Currently, OPRD does not have an agency plan or guide to support consistent outreach with underrepresented communities. However, OPRD staff and units have taken lead in identifying considerations and avenues to increase engagement and build upon current engagement strategies.

Examples of this include OPRD's process for rule making. The agency has made intentional efforts to expand public participation in rulemaking processes. OPRD has updated its rulemaking website to improve transparency and help the public understand how to participate in the rulemaking process. Staff continue to explore ways to make these processes more inclusive and accessible, particularly for communities historically underrepresented in public decision-making.

Additionally, OPRD will soon be opening the rule making process for the Ocean Shore State Recreation Area. This recreation area is composed of ocean shore recreational easement lands as well as OPRD fee-title owned lands below the statutory vegetation line or current vegetation line (whichever is further inland). This effort is in response to increasing environmental threats from climate change such as sea level rise, erosion, and the need to balance public access with ecological and cultural resource protection. The agency is reviewing existing rules and considering updates that would incorporate social and demographic impacts, with a focus on equitable access and long-term sustainability. Planning includes early engagement with tribal governments, coordination with other state agencies, and the formation of a rulemaking advisory committee. Public comment opportunities will be expanded, and OPRD is working to ensure that the process reflects the diverse needs of Oregon's coastal communities and visitors to Oregon's beaches.

Opportunities for Improvement & Request for Support

OPRD currently relies on staff to lead efforts regarding outreach based on their own professional experience and passion for ensuring equitable consideration and access to OPRD properties and programs. While OPRD is privileged to have staff who take on initiatives and include outreach considerations as a factor of their project planning, the agency needs to provide better support in the form of standard resources that allow all staff, regardless of experience, understand how to communicate and collaborate with Tribal partners and underrepresented communities.

As the resources and best practice for identifying communities to be served is not isolated to OPRD, but is relevant to all OPRD agencies, support from the Environmental Justice Council to provide resources related to best practices in outreach and identifying impacted communities would be extremely valuable not only to OPRD, but to all Oregon natural resource agencies.

Agency-Scoped Environmental or Health Burdens

Climate Change Impacts

OPRD, as a land, recreation, and cultural heritage management agency is charged with a mission to provide and protect these resources for current and future generations. As the effects of climate change intensify, it becomes a larger factor in agency planning and decision making. It also creates new opportunities for OPRD to better support and communicate with communities who not only rely on access to these spaces, but who may be disproportionately impacted by inaction to mitigate climate change related risks. OPRD has initiated a climate change planning effort to identify impacted areas, plan to respond to impacts, and ensure future assets and management decisions are made with climate resiliency in mind. While the planning process just began this past year, OPRD has been planning for and responding to climate change related disasters in ways that support community health and access.

OPRD is also responsible for implementing Governor Kotek's October 2025 Executive Order 25-26, which identified climate change and community resiliency actions that named agencies are required to fulfill. As part of this order, agencies are required to implement actions to meet the following goals: 1) Define Key Resilience Attributes for Land and Waters (identify and preserve resilient features); 2) Keep Oregon's Working Lands and Waters Working; 3) Conserve Natural Lands and Waters to Act as Resilience Anchors in the Face of Climate Change Impacts; 4) Lead by Example: State-Owned and Managed Lands and Waters; 5) Ensure a Livable Oregon. The efforts OPRD will undertake to support goal 5 will be especially aligned with environmental justice efforts.

An example of current OPRD practices related to climate change involves planning for and responding to the threat of wildfire. OPRD collaborates with local fire protection districts and the Oregon Department of Forestry to implement fuels reduction strategies in high-risk areas. For instance, at Cottonwood Canyon State Park, OPRD partnered with local fire districts to train fuels reduction crews and conduct vegetation management to reduce wildfire risk. Shortly after fuels reduction took place, the Ferry Fire burned through the property. These efforts not only protected park infrastructure but also reduced the fire's potential increased impact to nearby communities.

In the aftermath of wildfires, OPRD participates in post-fire recovery efforts through coordination with the Oregon Office of Emergency Management and other state and federal agencies. This includes supporting burn area assessments, restricting public access to hazardous areas, and developing recovery plans that prioritize ecological restoration and cultural resource protection. The agency also continues to work with tribal partners to ensure that traditional use

areas and culturally significant sites are considered in recovery planning, in addition to collaborating on inclusion of tribally significant plant species to be seeded or planted in post-fire recovery.

OPRD has also taken steps to reduce smoke exposure risks for both staff and visitors. The agency has installed air quality monitors at several park locations and uses real-time data to inform decisions about program cancellations and visitor advisories. These additional monitor stations not only provide OPRD staff and onsite users with increased information regarding respiratory health, but it also provides the communities where the parks are located with this vital information.

Additionally, OPRD is exploring the use of fire-resistant landscaping and infrastructure design in park development and maintenance. Staff have been trained to conduct wildfire risk assessments of park structures, and mitigation strategies, such as reseeding burned areas to prevent erosion, are being implemented as part of post-fire rehabilitation. These operational changes help lessen the impacts to properties and natural areas where access is not only important for mental and physical health of communities, but also for the cultural and traditional use of Tribal members.

Through these actions, OPRD demonstrates a commitment to reducing the environmental and health burdens associated with wildfire, while also supporting the resilience of the communities it serves.

Opportunities for Improvement & Request for Support

While OPRD continues to identify and plan for the impacts of climate change and reducing the environmental and health burdens facing local communities, particularly historically underrepresented communities, it is not the only state agency facing these challenges. Statewide support is needed to help OPRD and other state agencies meet the Governor's Executive Order 25-26, access shared resources, including best practices for identifying, managing, and communicating about climate related impacts such as wildfire, smoke, and sea level rise.

The Environmental Justice Council could play a key role in this effort by developing common tools or identifying lead agencies to support statewide coordination or development of these resources. This would help ensure that environmental justice considerations, burden assessments, and mitigation strategies are approached consistently and effectively across all State of Oregon agencies.

Looking Ahead

As OPRD continues to evolve its approach to environmental justice, the agency remains committed to learning, adapting, and improving how it serves all Oregonians, especially those who have historically been underrepresented or disproportionately impacted by environmental and health burdens.

In the coming year, OPRD will focus on:

- Finalizing and implementing the updated Strategic Plan, with belonging, equity, and engagement as well as financial sustainability as guiding principles.
- Aligning the Environmental Justice Report more closely with the agency's Belonging, Equity, and Engagement Plan to ensure consistency in values and agency action.
- Continuing to expand engagement with Tribal partners and underrepresented communities, particularly through planning, rulemaking, and climate adaptation efforts.
- Advancing the Climate Change Resilience Plan to guide long-term planning and resilience strategies.
- Strengthening internal tools available for staff to ensure environmental justice considerations are embedded across all programs and projects.

OPRD welcomes continued collaboration with the Environmental Justice Council and other state agencies to build shared resources, improve coordination, and ensure that environmental justice is approached consistently and effectively across Oregon's natural resource agencies.