



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Agriculture

635 Capitol St NE  
Salem, OR 97301-2532



October 24, 2019

Jason Miner, Natural Resources Policy Director  
Office of the Governor  
900 Court Street, Suite 254  
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Meta Loftsgaarden, Executive Director  
Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board  
775 Summer St NE, Suite 360  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Mr. Miner and Ms. Loftsgaarden,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Oregon's 100-year water investment vision. The Board of Agriculture advises the Oregon Department of Agriculture on policy issues, develops recommendations on key agricultural issues, and provides advocacy for the state's agriculture industry in general. Water is integrally tied to all aspects of the Department's mission to ensure healthy environment, natural resources, and economy for agriculture and all Oregonians now and *into the future*.

The Board of Agriculture greatly appreciates the state's attention to water resources and the need for long-term focus and investment. We are pleased to see the state considering a model for long-term investment that is similar to the state's investment in transportation infrastructure.

At the Board of Agriculture's meeting in Madras, Oregon on September 25-27, the Board discussed the goals of the vision, challenges the vision is intended to address, stakeholder engagement plans, and other considerations. Our feedback regarding these issues is below.

## 1. Strengthening the vision's connection to agriculture

While the vision mentions food production, the Board would like to see additional references to agriculture incorporated into the document. Specifically, water is vital to production of food, feed, fiber, seed, livestock, and horticultural products, and more broadly provides for the unique diversity of Oregon agriculture.

We would like the vision to recognize Oregon agriculture's efforts to conserve water and provide for clean water through publicly and privately funded conservation efforts. In addition to state programs that support clean water in agriculture, a variety of federal, state, and local partners, including farmers and ranchers, have implemented numerous projects to conserve and protect our state's water resources.

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## 2. Geographic scope of the vision

Reaching over state lines may be helpful in accomplishing the vision and may help the state identify additional strategies and sources of funding. Our neighboring states struggle with many of the same issues, and in some cases, have developed initiatives to address them.

In addition, Oregon shares a very important waterway with our neighboring state to the north. The Columbia River provides irrigation water, transportation pathways, fish and wildlife habitat, and hydropower, and it is important that the vision recognize the importance of the river to the region's future.

## 3. Scope of the vision and problem statement

While the vision and problem statement cover many critical issues and priorities, we have identified others that could be included in the document.

- Water affordability for a variety of users is one key issue that we believe should be included. This could be addressed by adding "affordable" to the economy goal.
- In the Pacific Northwest, water is an important transportation and power supply source as well as supplying the other needs mentioned in the vision.
- Wetlands and floodplains are not explicitly mentioned in the vision document but provide many important functions for clean and abundant water.
- Invasive species present a threat to clean water and habitat and in many cases, water availability as well.

The impacts of climate change to water supplies and water demand should be included in the premise of the vision. The premise outlines potential disasters associated with climate change but should also mention that in the long term, we are likely to have less water available when we need it. In addition, it would be helpful for the goals to reflect that we need to plan for future water scarcity and changing demographics. We are likely to see dramatic changes over one hundred years, and the vision should acknowledge that.

We recommend incorporating the need for new water storage projects into the problem statement; this language could reference innovative storage projects that allow for withdrawals when water is relatively abundant in the winter. Additional agriculture and water quantity issues, including the need for continued modernization and efficient water use in irrigation systems, could also be incorporated here.

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#### 4. Goals and outcomes of the vision

It would be helpful for the vision to articulate the connectivity of the goals, and avoid treating them as separate goals. One way to accomplish this would be a goal specifically discussing an integrated approach to implementation.

Additionally, the vision should also reference adaptive management and continuous improvement based on information about how we are doing to achieve the goals in the vision statement.

#### 5. Stakeholder engagement and communication about the vision

To successfully engage a broad base of stakeholders, including Oregonians who may not typically participate in public processes, it is important for the vision to be worded in as plain-language a manner as possible. The desired outcomes should be worded in such a way that the public is excited and interested about learning more and participating. Include Agency and Governor's office communications staff early and often in the vision rollout in order to assist with accessible communications.

Other states should be considered stakeholders as well as prospective partners in the development and accomplishment of the water vision. Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes should each have ongoing opportunities for government to government consultations with the state regarding Tribal needs and partnership opportunities with the State.

Stakeholder engagement efforts should include a greater focus on the Columbia basin, particularly intensively irrigated areas such as Morrow and Umatilla Counties. Engagement efforts throughout the state should include county commissioners and legislators.

Communications about the vision should provide clear information about what the state's role will be in achieving the vision. Possible roles for State government, including legislators and state agencies, could include: identifying data gaps needing to be addressed to support long-term planning, assessing and prioritizing needs; providing examples from other jurisdictions on how to address challenges; identifying funding sources, and; encouraging the use of natural infrastructure.

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Once again, thank you for launching this important effort to focus greater attention and investment in Oregon's water resources. We look forward to continued dialogue as the effort moves forward and welcome the opportunity for continued input.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Myers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marty Myers, Chair  
State Board of Agriculture

cc: Alexis Taylor, Director, Oregon Department of Agriculture