



OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE

2025-2029 Water Quality Program Strategic Plan



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Executive Summary

The purpose of the Agricultural Water Quality Program Strategic Plan is to lay out the Program's 5 year vision.

The Strategic Plan will guide the development of Annual Operating Plan's for the years 2025 to 2029. The Strategic Plan defines priority work, staffing resources and needs, and milestones for years 1, 3, and 5 for the WQ Program's ten Initiatives. Each of the WQ Program's Initiatives and milestones align with ODA's Strategic Goals of Organizational Excellence, Modernization, and Customer-Focused Service.

The WQ Program strives to ensure that staff are fully supported to provide initiatives that are designed to protect and improve water quality. We will ensure that our initiatives are clearly defined for our constituents including partners and landowners. In 5 years, we will have clearly defined what it means for landowners to be in compliance with Area Rules. In addition, we will have modernized data reporting in place that will allow us to clearly communicate and report progress for biennial reviews and for TMDL reporting.



Strategic Planning

The Agricultural Water Quality Program adheres to the strategic goals of the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

1. Organizational Excellence

2. Modernization

3. Customer-Focused Service

Commitment to excellence is demonstrated through active engagement with our mission: Protect. Promote. Prosper. Effective leadership, fiscal responsibility, an adaptive organizational structure, innovative use of technology, professional opportunities, and a welcoming environment are necessary for achieving organizational excellence

We are building a resilient ODA by ensuring the agency can anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to changing conditions and potential disruptions. This requires that our foundational functions meet the needs of our people today and in the future. By modernizing our systems, processes, and operations to align with current expectations, ODA's AGGIES will deliver exceptional services, making our people competitive in the marketplace. Our goal is to be a productive partner in success, fulfilling our mission to Protect. Promote. Prosper.

AGGIES serve all people by sharing Oregon's bounties. Our vision is to create a resilient future for everyone, ensuring equitable, seamless, and supportive customer engagement with ODA's services. As we modernize our internal systems throughout this strategic plan as we deliver on our mission: Protect. Promote. Prosper. ODA will prioritize the customer experience, ensuring that service delivery remains centered on their needs and expectations.

Our Values

We are proud to be AGGIES, embodying our mission and values to achieve our vision.



Approachable

Accessible and friendly, fostering a welcoming environment



Genuine

Sincere in interactions, emphasizing honesty and integrity



Growth-Oriented

Committed to continuous improvement and development



Inclusive

A culture that ensures the dignity of every individual is honored, heard, valued, and respected



Experts

Driven by professional and scientific competency



Sustainable

Building strong relationships and continuity for a resilient tomorrow

Equity Statement

ODA and the Agricultural Water Quality Program promotes diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in our work. While recognizing historical disparities of the past, we make it our responsibility to:

- Create an environment where every staff member feels recognized, valued, and empowered to contribute to our agency's mission.
- Provide culturally responsive services to the people of Oregon, fostering collaborative partnerships.
- Implement policies and actions prioritizing equity for all people in Oregon, support robust agricultural and food economies, and promote environmental stewardship and sustainability.

To demonstrate our dedication to equity, we commit to:

- Provide equity in the allotment and use of ODA resources.
- Regularly review and transform our policies, procedures, systems, and practices to reflect our faithfulness to diversity and inclusion.
- Align our core values with our commitment to cultivating a workplace culture rooted in equity and belonging.

ODA commits to integrating equity into our identity, ensuring we are recognized as an agency that protects, promotes, and prospers.



Program Goal

Prevent and control water pollution from agricultural activities and soil erosion and achieve applicable water quality standards.

Vision & Mission

VISION

Agricultural practices across Oregon protect clean water.

MISSION

Protect. Promote. Prosper.

Our mission is to protect water quality by ensuring compliance with the rules and improve water quality by supporting agricultural landowners with outreach, technical assistance, and funds to implement water-smart land management practices.



Principles of Operation

The ODA Agricultural Water Quality Program operates on the following five principles. These principles guide our daily work and decision making.



A. Collaboration

- We strive for excellent collaboration with state and local partners and strong relationships with the agricultural community. We prioritize collaborative solutions prior to the use of compliance actions.



B. Compliance

- Compliance is focused on the protection of water quality through proactive measures with an enforcement backstop.



C. Technical Assistance

- Water Quality staff provide technical assistance directly and through our conservation partners



D. Outreach

- Our outreach is focused on farmer, rancher, and landowner awareness and understanding of water quality causes and consequences.



E. Data and Best Science

- Planning, decisions, and recommendations are informed by the latest science and data.

Program History and Background

Clean Water Act

The national Clean Water Act, enacted 1948, amended in 1972, establishes the basic structure for regulating discharges of pollutants into the waters of the United States and regulating quality standards for surface waters. Its objective is to restore and maintain the integrity of the nation's waters. Under the Clean Water Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has developed national water quality criteria recommendations for pollutants in surface waters.

Each state develops their own program to address water quality concerns and meet pollution criteria recommendations. Enforcement of the Clean Water Act in Oregon was originally delegated to the state's Department of Environmental Quality.



Agricultural Water Quality Management Act

In 1993, the Oregon Legislature passed the Agricultural Water Quality Management Act directing ODA to develop plans to prevent and control water pollution from agricultural activities and soil erosion and achieve water quality standards and to adopt rules as necessary (ORS 568.900 through ORS 568.933). The Oregon Legislature passed additional legislation in 1995 to clarify that ODA is the lead agency for regulating agriculture with respect to water quality (ORS 561.191). The Area Plan and Area Rules were developed and subsequently revised pursuant to these statutes.

Between 1997 and 2004, ODA worked with LACs and SWCDs to develop Area Plans and Area Rules in 38 watershed-based Management Areas across Oregon (Figure 1.2). Since 2004, ODA, LACs, SWCDs, and other partners have focused on implementation including:

- Providing education, outreach, and technical assistance to landowners
- Implementing projects to improve agricultural water quality
- Investigating complaints of potential violations of Area Rules
- Conducting biennial reviews of Area Plans and Area Rules,
- Monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive management
- Developing partnerships with state and federal agencies, Tribes, watershed councils, and others.

The Agriculture Water Quality Program has lead responsibility for water quality protection in all areas of agricultural activities, including those within Groundwater Management Areas.



Working Relationship with Soil and Water Conservation Districts

ORS 568.906 requires ODA to work with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) “to the greatest extent practical”. As designated Local Management Agencies (LMA), SWCDs assist with the recruitment of Local Advisory Committees (LAC), development of Area Plan and Rules, and provide technical assistance to local landowners and managers.

In collaboration with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) ODA manages SWCD Capacity Grants which provide funding for implementing the Area Plans and providing planning, grant writing, funding, and project implementation to address water quality pollution and soil erosion in their districts. Because the Water Quality Program has limited resources, local SWCDs are the primary technical assistance and outreach providers to reach the goals of our program.



SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analyses were conducted at AgWQ Quarterly staff meetings, at Program Advisory Committee meetings, and the Oregon Association of Conservation District annual meeting during 2024 to inform the direction of the AgWQ Strategic Plan.

	Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications, • Inadequate staffing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TMDLs • Historic Relationships • OSU Water Technical Assistance Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Change • Landowner willingness
Soil and Water Conservation Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Partnership • District Funding • Collaborative Solutions • Enforcement of Rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient data • Monitoring capacity • Area Plans • Lack of consistency • Insufficient communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital reporting • Centralized info • Better defining “ag” and compliant practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Change (Temp, Wildfire, Floods, Pests, etc.) • Achievability of TMDLs • Insufficient funding
Program Advisory Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Accessible Leadership • Collaborative Approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of expertise on staff • Compliance clarity • Reliance on SWCDs for implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-disciplinary approach • Interagency collaboration • Connecting with new farming communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient shared baseline data, science, and effectiveness monitoring • Groundwater contamination • Disconnect between quality and quantity • Budget constraints • Impacts on wetlands and fish habitat

Initiatives and Strategies

The Agricultural Water Quality Program has nine initiatives (sub-program areas) within which we work. Each initiative has strategies to help the Agricultural Water Quality Program reach its primary goal. These Initiatives and Strategies provides the framework for developing the Annual Operating Plan. Each strategy can be linked back to both the ODA's Strategic Goals and the Agricultural Water Quality Program's Principles of Operation.

Key Initiatives

Initiatives with asterisks are associated with KPMs and performance metrics

Area Plans, Rules, and Reviews Initiative*

We regularly meet with regional committees, comprised primarily of local landowners, to develop strategies, plans, and objectives that address water quality concerns. The review of Area Plans and Rules in these meetings allows for informed decision making and coordinated actions to address water pollution in both surface and groundwater.

5 Year Vision: Area Plans are succinct, clear, and written in a manner that empowers SWCDs to help farmers and ranchers comply with water quality standards and identify progress towards water quality goals. Review processes are efficient. Area Rules are reviewed and updated regularly to address emerging local water quality issues and to ensure clarity and adequacy. Local Advisory Committees represent the diversity of the local agricultural sector and are actively engaged in guiding voluntary conservation actions included in Area Plan and Rules reviews. Either existing Area Plans and Rules or new Plans and Rules address groundwater protection issues.

Compliance and Enforcement Initiative*

We regulate nonpoint sources of water pollution from agricultural activities. The AgWQ Program strives to cooperatively work with landowners to find voluntary solutions to prevent and control water pollution while also maintaining a viable agricultural operation. Program statutes and administrative rules allow the AgWQ Program to use compliance and enforcement actions when needed to correct violations of Oregon's water quality laws.

5 Year Vision: How to be in compliance with the AgWQ Rules is clear and readily available to the public. Compliance cases are handled swiftly, and outcomes are consistent across the state. Compliance recommendations utilize best available science and up-to-date tech resources.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and Other Partnerships Initiative

Maintaining strong relationships with other agencies, SWCDs, nonprofit partners, universities, and others fosters collaboration and shared expertise, enabling more effective water quality management and implementation of best practices. We strategically leverage the strengths of partner organizations to help support farmers and ranchers in the best way possible.

5 Year Vision: We are engaged in reciprocal relationships with partner agencies and organizations. We understand the authorities, rules, and talents of other agencies and organizations and we support them. We leverage respective strengths and authorities to cohesively address water quality.

DEQ	ODA	OWEB	OSU Extension	SWCDs	Federal Partners
Sets water quality standards, conducts water body monitoring	Encourages voluntary action, enforces compliance with rules	Provides funding for technical assistance and restoration	Conducts research, determines best practices, offers educational outreach materials, workshops	Provide technical assistance; offer educational outreach materials, workshops, funding for restoration	Provide funding for technical assistance and restoration

Strategic Implementation (SIA) and Focus Areas (FA) Initiative*

By strategically focusing efforts and resources on small, impaired watersheds, we can provide targeted interventions that address specific sources of pollution, leading to more effective restoration.

5 Year Vision: We prioritize investing in watersheds of greatest water quality priority and proactively collaborate in areas impacted by TMDLs. SWCDs are well supported in hosting successful SIAs. SIAs lead to enhanced local partnerships, focused investment of restoration dollars, and improved ag land conditions.

Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Implementation Initiative*

We work collaboratively with local farmers, ranchers, and partners to identify locally relevant strategies to create TMDL Implementation Plans that will meet the parameters of a TMDL.

5 Year Vision: Farmers, ranchers, and landowners are meaningfully included in TMDL implementation planning and recommended practices are grounded in local conditions and feasibility. Program has clearly outlined and dedicated staff capacity to support effective TMDL implementation for agricultural lands.

Supporting Initiatives

GIS and Data Management Initiative

We leverage geographic information systems (GIS) and data management as tools to inform past, present, and future measures of water quality metrics and agriculture activities. This ability to collect, quantify, and analyze internal and external trusted data sources in an efficient, interactive, and accessible way reveals conceptual and geographical insight into improved, stable, and declining water quality. Further, with intelligent and informed GIS and data structures, the Water Quality Program can utilize innovative workflows to focus our limited resources to where targeted effort will result in the most successful water quality improvements. This strategy is critical for our program to plan for and rise to future water quality demands.

5 Year Vision: All internal program and water quality data is available through the AgWQ Spatial Resources Hub. Staff are actively engaged in app and tool use. Automation is incorporated for efficiency. Our data structures are compatible with the statewide Data Portal and our processes are well documented for sustainability.

Grant Management Initiative

We manage grant programs to fund projects that prevent and control water pollution from agricultural activities, soil erosion, and support farmers and ranchers to achieve applicable water quality standards. This funding also supports monitoring projects that ensure the effective use of resources to address the sources of water pollution and measure progress.

5 Year Vision: Grants administered by AgWQ demonstrably lead to improved conditions on agricultural lands and are awarded in areas of highest priority. Grant language is consistent across the program and written for understanding. Grant data is clearly organized and effectively managed by the best available software. We ensure that grantees are meeting the obligations of the grants and are effectively utilizing state resources.

Monitoring Initiative

Through our water quality monitoring program, we support, track, and encourage land and water monitoring that is reflective of agricultural influences on water quality. We need monitoring to document agricultural land and water quality conditions, evaluate how those conditions change over time, and determine whether conditions and implementation strategies will achieve Oregon's water quality goals. We use monitoring data as a part of a broad effort to continually review and determine the effectiveness of Area Plans and proposed measures. We also use monitoring data to help tell the story of agriculture's efforts to improve water quality to a broad audience.

5 Year Vision: We proactively identify watershed monitoring priorities and implement monitoring with local and state partners. Staff are well informed of monitoring results. Our data are useful, easy to understand, and tell a meaningful story of farmer and rancher-led conservation efforts through a public facing data portal.

Outreach and Education Initiative

Through collaboration with OSU Extension and SWCDs, we provide educational materials and recommended best practices to farmers and ranchers to ensure the protection of water quality without enforcement action.

5 Year Vision: We provide science-backed informational resources and recommend best management practices to farmers, ranchers, rural landowners, and SWCDs. Online resources are up-to-date and written to be accessible to diversity of agricultural producers in the state. Program outreach follows a plan, has dedicated staff capacity, and is targeted to the many segments of the public that we communicate with.

Staff Support and Development Initiative

We prioritize regular internal coordination and communication to ensure consistent external messaging and efficient processes. Staff are supported in skills development and encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities to incorporate the latest and best science into our program. The program lead team anticipates challenges for staff and proactively create solutions.

5 Year Vision: Staff are well-informed on best practices, confident users of new technology, and feel supported and encouraged in their professional growth. Communication across the program is clear and consistent. Staff are adequately resourced and accommodated for individual needs and success.

Strategic Goals

	Strategies	Principles of Operation	ODA Goals
Area Plans, Rules and Reviews	Conduct Biennial Reviews for Area Plans	A, B, D, E	#1, #2
	Update Area Rules to ensure enforceability	B, D	#2
	Recruiting and retaining local advisory committee members	A	#3
	Consult with DEQ on Area Plans and Rules	A, D	#1, #2
	Utilize existing or new Area Plans and Rules to address groundwater issues	A, B, D, E	#2
Compliance	Conduct compliance investigations in a timely manner	C, D	#3
	Coordinate compliance investigations with SWCDS and other agencies	A, B, C	#3
	Improve compliance case review and data management	B, D	#1, #2

Strategic Goals

	Strategies	Principles of Operation	ODA Goals
GIS and Data Management	Provide spatial data analysis and map products/tools for AgWQ Initiatives	D	#2, #3
	Research, develop, and improve data management processes and tools	D	#2
	Coordinate and collaborate with SWCDs and other GIS partners to adopt and improve new tools and workflows	A, D	#3
Grant Management	Direct and manage AgWQ Program Grants	A, C, D	#1
	Coordinate grant programs with state and local agencies	A	#1

Strategic Goals

	Strategies	Principles of Operation	ODA Goals
Monitoring	Develop and Implement AgWQ Program Monitoring Plan	D	#2
	Monitor TMDL Implementation Plans	D	#2
	Assist in developing and implementing SIA monitoring plans	A, D	#2
	Assist and advise partners' monitoring plans	A, D	#2, #3
	Develop and implement new monitoring methods	D	#2
Education and Outreach	Develop and implement AgWQ Program Communication Plan	C	#3

Strategic Goals

	Strategies	Principles of Operation	ODA Goals
SWCD and Other Partnerships	Participate in OWEB Regional Review Teams	A	#3
	Maintain good working relationships with local SWCDs	A	#3
	Maintain partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies	A	#3
SIAs and Focus Areas	Manage Strategic Implementation Areas	A, B, C, D	#2
	Collaborate with local, state, and federal partners in SIAs	A	#3
	Develop and manage Focused Ag Solutions Projects	A, B, C, D	#2
	Coordinate with SWCDs in Focus Areas	A, C, D	#3

Strategic Goals

	Strategies	Principles of Operation	ODA Goals
TMDL Implementation	Write TMDL Implementation Plans	D	#1, #2
	Implement TMDL Implementation Plans	A, B, C, D	#1, #3
	Coordinate with DEQ and other agencies on TMDL policy and development	A, D	#1, #3
Staff Support and Development	WQ staff stay up to date on training for their positions	E	#1
	The WQ team effectively communicates with each other	A	#1
	WQ Team Leads proactively anticipate program challenges and responses	A	#1, #3

Communications

The goal of the overall communications effort is to increase internal and external cohesion in the presentation of the ODA Water Quality Program and its work to protect water quality, prevent soil erosion, and meet water quality standards. A well-defined and consistent communications strategy will increase audience confidence in, and respect for, the work that the ODA Water Quality Program does, increase awareness of agricultural impacts on water quality, and encourage behavior change to protect water quality. (See the Communications Plan in the appendix).

Monitoring

The objective of ODA WQ Program monitoring is to accurately inform the water quality conditions influenced through agricultural practices. This includes development of monitoring strategies, oversight and review of monitoring plans, coordination of monitoring efforts with partners and agencies, support and guidance of on-the-ground monitoring efforts. Riparian and upland landscape conditions monitoring that have agricultural influences are important in defining the agricultural effect, as well as the actual in-stream water quality parameter monitoring. ODA's current monitoring emphasis is on intentionally connecting the data to observable goals, measurable objectives, or metrics, and the eventual display and reporting of the data.

GIS and Data Management

The Water Quality program takes strategic initiative in creating Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and data management systems that are streamlined, efficient, and relevant. The recent year has seen a data and workflow needs assessment, improved field data collection processes, and collaborative tools that enable staff self-sufficiency. Current data architecture and digitization projects will secure a future of automated data aggregation and reporting, freeing up staff's valuable time from tedious data mining. The future strategic aim for GIS and data management looks toward imagery-based analysis worked into statewide analysis to identify the where and how so that the program can funnel resources to make the biggest impact on maintaining and improving water quality. (See the GIS and Data Management plan in the appendix).

Metrics and KPMs

Objective review of WQ Program effectiveness and efficiency is best done by having set measurable program statistics. ODA WQ Program's State Key Performance Measures (KPM) are currently set by 64 DEQ Ambient Water Quality stations Oregon Water Quality Index (OWQI). These KPM's are generally declining due to increased temperatures and lack of water, which makes them not representative of the WQ program. Current emphasis is on defining and creating WQ Program metrics to be tracked internally and included in the process management system, with a subsequent goal of replacing the State KPM's with more meaningful program metrics which reflect the program's effectiveness.



Key Initiative Milestones

Initiative Milestone	Year 1	Year 3	Year 5
Area Plans, Rules, and Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 19 Biennial Reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 19 Biennial Reviews Review the rules related to Biennial Reviews to determine needed changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 19 Biennial Reviews Update rules related to Biennial Reviews to reflect needed changes.
Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define conditions that meet compliance with riparian rules Define “compliance” for each type of waste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and develop sufficient riparian rules to meet WQ standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate rules and develop rule changes. Evaluate all rules for adequacy and enforcement.
SWCD and Other Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water Quality Specialists actively participating in OWEB Regional Review Teams Water Quality Specialists meet with SWCDs and Boards at least twice per year Water Quality Program Advisory Committee meets twice per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water Quality Program Staff regularly meeting with other state and federal partners such as OSU Extension and NRCS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water Quality Program actively seeking partnerships with non-traditional partners.
SIA and Focus Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 10 HUCs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 30 HUCs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 50 HUCs
TMDL Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 2 TMDL Implementation Plans. Complete 1 TMDL Annual Implementation Plan Report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 4 TMDL Implementation Plans. Complete 4 TMDL Annual Implementation Plan Reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 2 TMDL Implementation Plans. Complete 8 TMDL Annual Implementation Plan Reports.

Supporting Initiative Milestones

Initiative Milestone	Year 1	Year 3	Year 5
GIS and Data Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop POPs and apply for grants for technological improvements. All grant applications will use the AgWQ Hub. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIA remote evaluations are automated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data is automatically pulled from reports to produce Biennial Reviews and TMDL annual reports.
Grant Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent processes are implemented across all grants within AgWQ Program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate with partners to ensure adequate ongoing funding for grants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants are sufficiently tracked to ensure effective use of funds and results from use of funds.
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ODA Monitoring Plan to be updated. All SIAs have approved monitoring plans in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring plans are focused into TMDL areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ODA actively seeks opportunities to work with agricultural partners and SWCDs to implement monitoring in TMDL areas.
Outreach and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared talking points are developed for AgWQ Program initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent outreach tools are shared by all districts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WQ Program information is available in multiple formats that are locally relevant.
Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff will have an individual development plan in place. Continuing education is built into every quarterly staff meeting. 100% participation in Employee Engagement Survey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff will complete at least 16 hours of continuing education annually. 100% participation in Employee Engagement Survey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff will complete at least 16 hours of continuing education annually. 100% participation in Employee Engagement Survey.

Resource Needs

As part of Strategic Planning, staff completed a workload analysis associated with the Initiatives and Strategies. The workload analysis shows where staff are currently spending their time and where there may be gaps associated with the initiatives. The workload analysis showed that there are gaps in the Outreach and Education and TMDL Implementation initiatives.

Position Title	FTE	Notes
Business Operations Manager	1	
Natural Resource Specialist 3	10	
Natural Resource Specialist 4	3	Total includes one vacancy at time of writing
Operations & Policy Analyst	1	
Program Analyst	1	
Information Systems Specialist 3	1	

Ideal Resources

Staff FTE

- Competencies
 - TMDL Planner and Implementation Staff
 - Riparian Specialist
 - Compliance Staff
 - Outreach and Education staff
 - Database (SQL) manager

Appendix

AgWQ Program Metrics and Data Management Plan





**OREGON
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635 Capitol St NE
Salem, OR 97301-2532
503.986.4550 | Oregon.gov/ODA | [@ORDeptAg](https://twitter.com/ORDeptAg)