



Photo of September Oregon Water Resources Commission field tour of the Pelton-Round Butte Dam Complex along the Deschutes River. Seen here are Josh Newton (Best Best & Kreiger, LLP), Austin Smith, Jr. (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs), and Megan Hill (Portland General Electric) describing efforts to restore salmonid populations following the dam's construction over 60 years prior. Photo Credit: Michael Coiner

Oregon Water Resources Department 2025 Government-to-Government Report



The Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) values its long-standing working relationship with Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes. This report contains key contact information, a summary of interactions, and related training attended by OWRD staff.

2025 Government-to-Government Report

Oregon Water Resources Department

<https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/aboutus/Pages/Tribal-Government-Relations.aspx>

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OREGON WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT STATEMENT AND POLICY

On September 23, 1997, the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) adopted the Government-to-Government Interest Statement, based on two key objectives: (1) honor and protect existing Tribal rights to use water, and (2) continue forging partnerships to share responsibility for water management. That interest statement forms the foundation for our current policy on tribal relations (see *Policy on Relationship with Tribes*, appended to this report).

OVERVIEW

OWRD works with Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes on issues related to water supply, watershed management, and water distribution, including matters related to water rights held or claimed by Tribes. In addition, OWRD works with Tribes on a government-to-government basis to address water issues of mutual interest.

The following are agency actions undertaken to engage with multiple Tribes; Tribe-specific areas of engagement are outlined further below.

General Coordination

The Director's Office houses a water policy analyst that also serves as OWRD's Tribal Liaison to facilitate engagement between OWRD and the Tribes.

The Natural Resources Workgroup (NRWG), the Cultural Resources Cluster (CRC), and the Legislative Commission on Indian Services (LCIS) convene regularly throughout the year and offer valuable opportunities to share information on agency programs, efforts, rulemaking, and legislative concepts. During 2025, OWRD participated in these regular meetings. OWRD will continue to attend and seek to engage Tribes through the NRWG, CRC, and LCIS on OWRD projects and policies of potential interest to Tribes.

With respect to annual training, in January 2025, OWRD staff received an LCIS training on [Inadvertent Discovery of Human Remains](#). Two members of OWRD's field staff attended the Oregon State Parks Archaeology Awareness Training held in The Dalles (April 2-5, 2024). OWRD's Director as well as the Planning, Collaboration and Investments Division Administrator attended the Tribal-State Government-to-Government Annual Summit held in Coos Bay (October 7-8, 2025). OWRD's Tribal Liaison has shared and encouraged all staff to view [The Heart and Spirit of Tribal Consultation](#) and the [Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Training: Fish and Wildlife as Cultural Resources & Basics of Tribal Sovereignty and Treaty Rights](#) and will continue to do so on a periodic basis. LCIS staff have indicated that training opportunities are forthcoming in 2026; OWRD will take advantage of those opportunities as they arise. The Director's office will continue to explore other training options with LCIS as well as share this report and state laws, policies, and educational resources with staff.

The Director's office also reviews fee-to-trust applications submitted by Tribes to the Bureau of

Indian Affairs. During 2025, OWRD received seven requests for application review: one each from Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw and the Coquille Indian Tribe; two from the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians; and three from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

State-Tribal Water Policy Forum

September 19, 2025, OWRD's Director sent letters/emails out to the leadership of the Tribes, requesting input on creating an ongoing State-Tribal Water Policy Forum, to help foster dialogue between Tribal and State leadership as well as consider state water governance, Integrated Water Resources Strategy implementation, and Tribal Water Task Force recommendations. To date, a majority of the nine Tribes have responded and expressed interest in participating; an additional planning meeting for the Forum is likely to convene in early 2026.

Tribal Cultural Survey/Tribal Cultural Items Contact

November 25, 2025, the Governor's Director of Tribal Affairs provided updated requirements to renew Oregon's Tribal Cultural Items and Identifying Agency Contact. These requirements stem from recommendations made by the [Tribal Cultural Items Task Force](#). OWRD's Tribal Liaison will continue to serve as the primary contact for matters and inquiries relating to cultural items.

The Governor's Office also has requested that each annual report include a summary of each agency's past Tribal cultural survey efforts. In November of 2019, OWRD submitted an Inventory of Items of Tribal Cultural Interest to the nine federally recognized Oregon Tribes, the Governor's Office, and LCIS. OWRD periodically assesses whether updates to the 2019 Inventory are needed and will include any update in the annual Government-to-Government Report. No additional items of cultural interest beyond those identified in the 2019 report have been identified.

The Governor's Office also has requested a summary of ongoing survey work. Currently, survey efforts are focused on documents that are eligible for destruction per Secretary of State guidance. To comply with 2023 legislation amending ORS 192, prior to destroying any records identified as having Tribal cultural value that are stored at the State Records Center, the OWRD Records Officer will send a written notification to each Tribe to give Tribes the opportunity to review and object to any destruction. If no objections or requests for additional information are filed, the OWRD Records Officer will proceed with destruction per the State's guidance. The pre-existing inventory of documents stored at the State Records Center that are eligible for destruction is not detailed and gives little insight into the nature of the documents. Therefore, in October 2024, the Records Officer and Tribal Liaison inspected the documents eligible for destruction and determined that, while the majority of the documents were duplicates and/or available electronically, Tribes may wish to review some of them prior to destruction. Because the volume of documents of potential interest was small and the cost of storage de minimis, the Department decided not to proceed with destruction until the agency could provide a more detailed description of their contents to the Tribes. Time and resources allowing, in 2026, the Department will compile a list with brief descriptions of the documents eligible for destruction and notify the Tribes consistent with ORS 192.

Consistent with the Governor's Office request, in 2026 the Department will develop and implement a plan to resurvey all of its offices for items of Tribal cultural interest and provide an update in the 2026 Government-to-Government report.

Water Rights

OWRD remains engaged in ongoing discussions with some of the Tribes on issues related to water rights and administration of water resources. Activities are generally conducted under Executive Order 96-30, or specific provisions of federal and state law.

OWRD received 43 instream water right applications in the Mid-Coast Basin and one in the North Coast Basin requesting to maintain water instream for the conservation, maintenance and enhancement of aquatic and fish life, wildlife, and fish and wildlife habitat. OWRD is releasing the first of several documents in the processing of these applications, and notification, as well as information for how to provide comments, concerns or other engagement related to these instream water right applications, has been sent to each Tribe.

As the lead agency for Oregon's hydroelectric laws (ORS 543 and 543A), OWRD administers the Hydroelectric Application Review Team (HART) for state projects. Besides OWRD, the core HART is made up of representatives from Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). Where Tribes may be affected by a project or involved as a project applicant, the HART members work to ensure coordination. OWRD also notifies LCIS of any new applications filed for hydroelectric projects and this notice is forwarded to the appropriate tribal representatives.

OWRD received a total of 105 temporary instream lease applications during 2025 (as of November 12, 2025).

More updates concerning Tribal-specific engagement on water rights issues are outlined below.

Water Management and Water Use Regulation

OWRD works with Tribes to plan and implement strategies for streamflow restoration and riparian protection on both reservation lands and lands that are culturally significant to Tribal communities. These strategies may include streamflow measurement and monitoring, enforcement on illegal water uses, and the transfer or lease of out-of-stream water rights to instream water rights for the benefit of fish and wildlife, recreation, and water quality. Additionally, the OWRD Surface Water Section and Groundwater Sections coordinate and communicate any soil disturbance activities related to stream gaging activities or OWRD observation well drilling with Tribal cultural resource representatives across the state.

Observation Well Installation: During 2025, OWRD sent letters offering to coordinate and/or consult on the proposed installation of two observation wells, consisting of two wells in the upper Klamath Basin to the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, and the Klamath Tribes. OWRD staff met virtually with cultural resources staff from The Klamath Tribes in March and April to discuss the Department's inadvertent discovery plans and adjusted the project plan to include hiring a Tribal monitor. The project was completed in April and May with a Tribal monitor onsite during the portions of the

project where inadvertent discovery was possible.

Stream Gage Installation: As part of an effort to collect more accurate data about Oregon's water supplies, OWRD is expanding the gage network by installing and operating up to 10 new stream gages over the next several years. This new data will support development of the Surface Water Information Modeling System (SWIMS), basin studies (e.g., Fifteenmile Creek and Walla Walla), and regulatory needs to calculate water availability. The project team identified and prioritized locations across the state by evaluating the current gage network, recent gage history, and data needs. Once a stream gage location is identified, engagement efforts include (1) contacting LCIS to determine which Tribes may have a potential interest in the proposed site, (2) contacting SHPO to determine if a survey has occurred and whether Tribal consultation and mitigation may be needed based on survey results, (3) drafting an Inadvertent Discovery Plan (IDP), and (4) notifying Tribal staff and leadership of the proposal to install stream gages at a location of potential interest to the Tribe(s) and providing the SHPO, IDP, and project information while inviting both staff-to-staff coordination and government-to-government consultation. 2025 engagement activities include the following:

- In February, OWRD engaged with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, and Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs on the proposed installation of a stream gage on Abiqua Creek (Marion County). OWRD received no Tribal response; this stream gage is now installed.
- In March, OWRD engaged with the Burns Paiute Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and Klamath Tribes on the proposed installation of a stream gage on the Silvies River (Harney County). WRD received no Tribal response; this stream gage is now installed.
- In July, OWRD engaged with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs on the proposed installation of a stream gage on Fifteenmile Creek (Wasco County). OWRD received no Tribal response; this stream gage is now installed.
- In September, OWRD engaged with the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Coquille Indian Tribe, and Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians on the proposed installation of a stream gage on the North Fork Coquille River (Coos County). OWRD has received no Tribal response to date; the project is still in the planning and permitting phase.
- In October, OWRD engaged with the Burns Paiute Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and Klamath Tribes on the proposed installation of a stream gage on Emigrant Creek (Harney County). OWRD has received no Tribal response to date; the project is still in the planning and permitting phase.

As future potential stream gage locations are identified, the Department will continue to follow the same protocol with respect to Tribal engagement.

Surface Water Information Modeling System (SWIMS) Development: In 2023, OWRD received funding to develop SWIMS as a modern replacement to the Water Availability Reporting System (known as “WARS”). The project aims to update the modeling framework used to calculate surface water availability for new water allocation permits and produce more updated data that reflects streamflow and water use information under more recent climate conditions. During 2025, OWRD sent letters to Tribal leadership and staff for each of the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon, inviting those who may have subject matter expertise to help inform the scientific and technical approaches taken to update the water availability modeling framework. None of the Tribes accepted the invitation. In April, OWRD staff provided the LCIS Natural Resources Work Group with a presentation on this ongoing effort.

Statewide Evapotranspiration (ET) Project: In April 2025, OWRD staff provided the LCIS Natural Resources Work Group with an overview of the Statewide Evapotranspiration (ET) Project. As directed in HB 2018 (2021), OWRD worked with researchers from Desert Research Institute (DRI) and OpenET Inc. to produce a peer-reviewed report on statewide historical irrigation consumptive use and estimates of open water evaporation from all major reservoirs. OWRD is using these data for basin studies, storage distribution estimates, water budgets, and field work planning, and exploring other uses. DRI webpage with report and data: <https://www.dri.edu/project/owrd-et/>. In April, OWRD staff provided the LCIS Natural Resources Work Group with a presentation on this ongoing effort.

City of Stayton Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) Project: In November 2022, the City of Stayton received funding from the Department to develop an ASR project at Mill Creek Park, designed to store approximately 480 acre-feet of drinking water. As required by statute, in 2024, OWRD completed a Seasonally Varying Flow (SVF) analysis to assess ecological impacts on the North Santiam River, Stayton’s water source. Upon completion of the analysis, OWRD coordinated with LCIS to identify Tribes who might have an interest or be impacted by the ASR project and/or might want to engage on the SVF analysis. In November 2024, OWRD sent letters inviting both coordination and government-to-government consultation to the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR), and Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; only CTGR engaged further. Their feedback was addressed through a January 10, 2025, virtual meeting and follow-up written communications. CTGR indicated that their questions concerning the SVF analysis were addressed by OWRD staff and requested periodic project updates. The Tribes also asked to be contacted immediately if any cultural resources are discovered. In response, the project team updated the Inadvertent Discovery Plan in coordination with OWRD’s Tribal Liaison and shared the IDP with CTGR.

More updates regarding Tribal-specific engagement on issues concerning water management and water use regulation are included below.

Legislative Work

OWRD staff provide regular updates on legislative and budget efforts during the quarterly CRC, NRWG, and LCIS meetings. A full breakdown of OWRD 2025-2027 Legislatively Adopted Budget and 2025 Legislative Summary can be found [online](#).

2025-27 Legislatively Adopted Budget: During the 2025-27 Legislative Session, the Department received a total budget of \$268,036,336, representing a 15% increase in the funds compared to the prior session and a net loss of one staff position. The increase was directed to grant programs and awards, including \$2.5 million pass-through funds to the Washington Department of Ecology in support of the Walla Walla 2050 Plan; \$8 million for competitive grants for water projects, \$1 million for competitive grants for feasibility studies, and \$1 million for grants for domestic well abandonment, repair, and replacement. A notable staff reduction was the permanent loss of the Senior Water Advisor position, located in the North Central region and primarily tasked with supporting work related to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation water rights settlement.

2025 Legislative Summary: During the session, the Department monitored several bills of potential interest to the Tribes, including

- House Bill (HB) 2069 (2025): Establishes a 17-member Tribal Consultation Task Force to identify and clarify the requirements of state agencies to engage in Tribal consultation. The bill directs the Office of the Governor to provide staff to support the 2025 Task Force and includes a one-time appropriation of \$70,000 in support.
- HB 2801 (2025): Provides permanent authority for the Department to process temporary transfers and instream leases for determined claims in the Upper Klamath Basin and repeals that authority upon completion of the adjudication.
- HB 3364 (2025): Summarized in 2025-26 Funding Program Updates (see below).
- HB 3806 (2025): Authorizes the Commission to approve a pilot surface water banking program for the Deschutes River Basin, sunseting January 2, 2034.. The Bank must be approved by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. The bill also allows for split rate and split duty water use, provided the duty does not exceed 4.2-acre feet per acre. The bill allows entities in the Deschutes River Basin to fund a position at the Department to support this work.
- Senate Bill (SB) 761 (2025): Authorizes a pilot program, sunseting January 2, 2030, allowing the Walla Wall Irrigation District to split the rate and duty of a water right temporarily between an existing use and an instream use.
- SB 1154 (2025): Modifies processes for managing ground water quality contamination concerns, including the declaration of ground water quality concern areas and ground water quality management areas (GWMA); also requires coordination, monitoring, action planning and remediation among state agencies and local entities. Grants the Oregon Water Resources Commission authority to declare a serious water management problem area based on groundwater quality and adopt rules requiring backflow prevention devices and parameters for OWRD inspection; also allows the Department to issue water rights in a GWMA for public water systems to offset the amount of water provided by abandoned wells.

The Department faced fee revenue shortfalls for staff in the Well Construction and Licensing

section, Dam Safety section, and Water Right Transactions Division. These programs are core to the Department's mission of responsibly managing Oregon's water resources and maintaining public safety. Two bills were passed to address the shortfalls to maintain existing staffing levels for the 2025-2029 period (HB 2803 (2025) and HB 2808 (2025)).

Department water right transaction workloads and long processing times also were a major focus during the legislative session. In addition to fee increases to maintain existing service levels, policy improvements aimed to reduce processing times, minimize and reduce future backlogs, and ensure a clear, consistent process that promotes timely and informed decisions, and while providing due process. Two bills were passed improve water rights transaction processes (HB 3342 (2025) and HB 3544 (2025)).

2026 Legislative Session Preparation: For the 2026 Legislative Session, the Department anticipates the bulk of work to focus on reconciling state budget shortfalls across agencies resulting from reduced federal funding and lower than expected revenue projections. State agencies received direction from the Legislative Fiscal Office to prepare a list of reduction options for General Fund, Lottery Funds, and Other Funds amounting to a 5% reduction by fund type, from the agency's 2025-27 legislatively adopted budget, excluding debt service and bond proceeds. The Department presented information on the 5% reduction options to the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources on November 18, 2025. Available [online](#). The Department anticipates that during the 2026 session, the Legislature will evaluate agency budgets and may make reductions to ensure a balanced budget should revenue projections continue to show shortfalls.

Rulemaking

During 2025, OWRD was engaged in four different rulemaking efforts, each at different stages of development: Harney Basin program rules (Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) 690-512), administration of the Place-based Water Planning Fund and state recognition process (OAR 690-602), best practices in community engagement plans for Department funded water projects (OAR 690-601), and water rights transactions process improvements (OAR 690-002, -014, -017, -018, -052, -053, -054, -077, -300, -305 (new), -310, -315, -320, -325, -330, -340, -380, -382). The Tribal Liaison provided rulemaking updates to Tribal leadership and staff at each quarterly Cultural Resources Cluster and Natural Resources Work Group Meeting, emphasizing an open invitation to join the Rules Advisory Committee (RAC) for each rulemaking effort as well as to coordinate and/or consult on the rulemaking. Further Tribal engagement is described below.

Final Rulemakings: During 2025, OWRD completed three rulemakings. In March 2025, the Commission adopted new rules pertaining to best practices in community engagement plans for Department funded water projects (OAR 690-601). These rules went into effect April 1, 2025. In response to public comment an additional rule (OAR 690-601-600) was proposed regarding public notice requirements, which was adopted and went into effect June 13, 2025.

Consistent with Government-to-Government coordination and consultation responsibilities, on July 16, 2024, the Department mailed and emailed formal letters to Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes, inviting coordination and/or consultation on this rulemaking and other

proposed rulemakings. These correspondences included an invitation to join the RAC. The Department also provided rulemaking updates during quarterly Cultural Resources Cluster and Natural Resources Work Group staff-to-staff meetings (held January, February, July, and September of 2024), again offering to consult and/or coordinate with interested Tribes. No Tribes requested to initiate formal consultation. However, representatives of the Burns Paiute Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation served on the RAC.

During the public comment period, the Department received input from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde emphasizing the importance of including the Tribes in the process of developing the framework for community engagement. The Department will prioritize collaboration with Tribes as it integrates community engagement planning into the Feasibility Study Grant program. More information is on the Department's Division 601 rulemaking webpage.

In March 2025, the Commission adopted new rules pertaining to the administration of the Place-based Water Planning Fund and state recognition process (OAR 690-602). These rules went into effect April 1, 2025.

Consistent with Government-to-Government coordination and consultation responsibilities, July 16, 2024, the Department mailed and emailed formal letters to Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes, inviting coordination and/or consultation on this rulemaking and other proposed rulemakings. These correspondences included an invitation to join the RACT. The Department also provided rulemaking updates during quarterly Cultural Resources Cluster and Natural Resources Work Group meetings (held January, February, July, and September of 2024), again offering to consult and/or coordinate with interested Tribes. No Tribes requested to initiate formal consultation, and none expressed interest in serving on the RAC.

During the public comment period, the Department received input from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Both Tribes were generally supportive of the rules while emphasizing the importance of including Tribes and ensuring equity during the application review process. More information is on the Department's Division 602 rulemaking webpage.

December 11, 2025, the Commission adopted new rules pertaining to groundwater management in the Harney Basin (OAR 690-512). Tribal engagement on this rulemaking dates back at least as far as December 16, 2022, when OWRD notified (in writing and by email) all nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon of the proposed Division 512 rulemaking, inviting participation informally through RAC representation or other coordination efforts and formally through government-to-government consultation.

Also, in early 2023, consistent with OAR 690-010-0150, which requires engagement with "any federally recognized Indian [T]ribes in Oregon who have expressed an interest in the proposed critical groundwater area," the Department again contacted the Burns Paiute Tribe to invite a representative to serve on the RAC as well to engage through consultation. The RAC invitation was accepted, and a Burn Paiute Tribal representative served on the RAC, which ran from April 2023 through May 2025; the representative attended for all but the last two RAC meetings which were held in May 2025. [More information is on the Department's Division 512 rulemaking](#)

[webpage.](#)

On June 21, 2024, OWRD notified (in writing and by email) all nine Tribes of the availability of the Groundwater Report for the Harney Basin Critical Groundwater Area (CGWA) Rulemaking, also inviting participation informally during the RAC process as well as formally through government-to-government consultation. Only the Burns Paiute Tribe requested further engagement (summarized under “Other Work with Individual Tribes” below).

Throughout the Division 512 rulemaking process, the Department provided regular staff-to-staff updates during quarterly LCIS meetings. Staff updates were provided to the LCIS Cultural Resources Cluster on January 19, May 14, June 12, and October 31, 2024; January 29, July 23, and October 28, 2024; and January 28, April 15, August 27, 2025. Staff updates were provided to the LCIS Natural Resources Work Group on January 17, April 20, August 17, and December 7, 2023; February 2 and September 11, 2024; and January 15 and April 30, 2025.

Active Rulemakings: During 2025, OWRD initiating a new rulemaking relating to water rights process improvements, which will (1) implement House Bill 3342 (2025) relating to water rights transactions; (2) implement House Bill 3544 (2025) relating to contested case processes; (3) reinstate efforts to update OAR 690-077 rules relating to instream water transactions; and (4) make other policy and process improvements to impacted rule divisions. This rulemaking effort has a very aggressive timeline. Because House Bill 3342 (2025) requires implementation by April 1, 2026, the Department will be proposing rules for adoption during the Commission’s March 2026 meeting. [More information is on the Department’s Water Rights rulemaking webpage.](#)

August 1, 2025, the Department invited Tribal representatives from Oregon’s nine federally recognized Tribes to serve on the RAC and informed the Tribes that a formal letter inviting further engagement as well as government-to-government consultation was forthcoming. September 5, 2025, the Director invited (in writing and by email) Oregon’s Nine Tribes to engage during the Department’s water rights process improvements rulemaking effort, informally through the RAC process or other coordination and/or formally through government-to-government consultation. Representatives of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation accepted the invitation to serve on the RAC, with the first RAC meeting held September 17. The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians requested a briefing on the rulemaking which was held on September 19, 2025. The Klamath Tribes request formal consultation on the rulemaking, which occurred with the Director on October 21, 2025.

Department staff have provided regular staff-to-staff updates during quarterly LCIS meetings. Staff updates for the current rulemaking were provided to the LCIS Cultural Resources Cluster on August 27 and October 9, 2025 and the LCIS Natural Resources Work Group on October 9, 2025. The Tribal Liaison will provide an update on the rulemaking effort at the next quarterly meetings for the Cultural Resources Cluster (January 28, 2026) and the Natural Resources Work Group (date to be determined).

Strategic and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) Plan

On March 17, 2025, the Department contacted Tribal leadership and staff to provide an update on its internal strategic planning process which will guide the agency's work from 2025 through 2030. The Department's [Strategic and DEIJ Plan](#) relies on priority actions outlined in the updated Integrated Water Resources Strategy. The Department also shared updates on the Plan during the quarterly staff-to-staff CRC and NRWG meetings. In September 2025, the Water Resources Commission adopted the final Strategic and DEIJ Plan.

The Department's integrated its strategic planning effort with its DEIJ Plan and is reflected in the Executive Summary as follows:

Water is a vital public resource that sustains Oregon's communities, ecosystems, and economy. Its availability and accessibility are increasingly threatened by climate change and other emerging pressures. These challenges demand a proactive, inclusive, and adaptive response.

In recognition of this urgency, the Department has developed a Plan to optimize the Department's work and embed equity throughout the Department's operations, programs, and services.

The Plan emphasizes the Department's commitment DEIJ with the following acknowledgement:

Recognizing the environmental and systemic challenges that impact water accessibility, the Department developed this Plan with an intentional focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. While water scarcity affects all communities, environmental justice communities often face disproportionate risks and burdens.

We also acknowledge Oregon's long-standing exclusionary water policies, particularly the prior appropriations system, which is common among many western states. This system has excluded some communities from securing water rights as they were often tied directly to property ownership. While this system is set in law and it is our responsibility to follow the law, we also have a responsibility to analyze and inform on how policies impact equity around the state.

DEIJ is recognized by the Department as a foundational element embedded in all aspects of our work. As such, DEIJ considerations were integrated throughout every stage of strategic plan development. This included creating a DEIJ workplan and conducting an informal assessment to identify existing gaps, strengths, and opportunities.

With respect to Tribes, the Plan's priority areas include

- Increase Tribal and community participation in water planning efforts to meet instream and out-of-stream water needs, protect drinking water sources, improve water quality and promote drought resiliency; and
- Thoughtful, targeted, and improved communication with Tribes and other disproportionately impacted communities who may face barriers in policy development and accessing service.

Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRs)

The IWRS provides an inter-agency roadmap for better understanding and meeting Oregon's instream and out-of-stream water needs. The third IWRS was adopted on September 11, 2025, by the Oregon Water Resources Commission (OWRC). The update addresses climate more holistically, applies an equity lens to the framework, and incorporates findings from the work under the 100-Year Water Vision. Unlike previous version of the IWRS (2012 and 2017), the 2025 IWRS identifies priority tasks where key agencies intend to focus their efforts over the next 8 years.

January 2024, OWRD sent letters to Oregon's Tribes seeking input on the Draft 1 of the third IWRS; Draft 1 was available for public review and comment from March 5 to April 5, 2024. In April 2024, the Governor's Office requested a delay in releasing Draft 2 to allow the confirmation of several new natural resource directors and to articulate more definitive outcomes to serve the water needs and interests of all Oregonians.

December 2024, OWRD sent letters to Oregon's Tribes announcing the anticipated release of Draft 2 in January 2025. There was an unexpected delay in releasing Draft 2. In March 2025, the Department sent letters to Oregon's Tribes inviting input and/or consultation on Draft 2 which was released in April. Upon request, OWRD met with Tribal leadership and staff of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde to provide a briefing on Draft 2 and answer questions. Three Tribes, the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, submitted written comments on Draft 2. The interagency team worked to incorporate these comments into Draft 3 of the 2025 IWRS. September 2, 2025, the Department presented an overview of Draft 3 at the Tribal-State Water Policy Forum. September 11, the Commission adopted Draft 3, with minor revisions, as final.

In October 2025, OWRD sent letters to Oregon's Tribes seeking input on future statutorily required biennial interagency IWRS workplans. The 2025-27 biennial workplan is under development, to be completed by the end of the year. November 2025, upon request, the Department held a work session with the Burns Paiute Tribe to review the work plan. During the session, the Burns Paiute Tribe reminded the Department of its ongoing interest in pursuing a co-management agreement within the Harney Basin. The Department anticipates further discussions about this topic in 2026.

OWRD continues to share regular IWRS updates with the Tribes during the quarterly CRC and NRWG meetings.

Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Planning

Place-Based Water Planning (PBWP) is a voluntary, locally led, and collaborative process that brings together an area's water interests to develop a holistic understanding of the area's water resources and plan for a water future that promotes and sustains a healthy economy, environment, and society. Through PBWP, OWRD and other state agencies provide guidance, funding, and technical assistance to place-based initiatives to bring interested parties together, develop and update plans, and coordinate plan implementation. Upon completion, state-recognized Place-Based Water Plans: identify actions that help meet current and future instream

and out-of-stream water quantity, quality, and ecosystem needs; aid state agencies in identifying and considering regional priorities; and provide a platform for continued collaboration to solve complex regional water issues.

In 2015, four planning collaboratives were selected to pilot the [2015 Draft Planning Guidelines](#) in the Harney Basin, Mid-Coast Region, Lower John Day Sub-Basin, and Upper Grande Ronde Sub-Basin. Since then, OWRD has awarded \$2.4 million to those planning collaboratives to develop and implement their plans. All four resulting Place-Based Water Plans have been recognized by the Water Resources Commission. Additionally, the Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative (engaged in the PBWP process since 2020) is expecting to seek state recognition of its plan in 2026. Several Tribes are vital partners in these planning efforts. Specific tribal involvement in PBWP efforts is discussed further below (see “Other Work with Individual Tribes”).

The 2023 Legislature made the Place-Based Water Planning Fund permanent (ORS 537.872 and 537.873) and allocated \$2 million to the fund for grants and other work to support PBWP. OWRD is updating the program to reflect the Fund’s new statutory language, [lessons learned](#) during the PBP Pilot, and [recommendations](#) from the State Supported Regional Water Planning and Management Workgroup. As part of that work:

- New program rules were adopted in March 2025 (OAR 690-602). All nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon were invited to coordinate, consult and/or join the RAC and representatives of the Burns Paiute Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation served on the RAC Advisory Committee in Fall 2024.
- Program guidance is being updated. All nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon were invited to provide comment or consult on the new *Draft Handbook*.
- OWRD is working to improve technical assistance and interagency coordination for PBWP.

All of these efforts will help provide direction and sideboards for the equitable distribution of fund resources across the state and clarity around planning processes and outcomes.

OWRD expects to open the first grant solicitation of the new PBWP fund in early 2026. Tribes will be eligible to receive grants through the fund and will be notified before any funds are issued if they are within the proposed planning boundary of an application.

Chewaucan Basin Planning

In 2022, in response to a request from both local and statewide interests, OWRD contracted with Portland State University’s Oregon Consensus to conduct a neutral situation assessment to determine whether and how a collaborative agreement-seeking process might help address ongoing concerns around water quality, quantity, and habitat in the Chewaucan Basin and Lake Abert. The assessment asked the following questions:

- Are the conditions ripe for collaboration between Tribes, ranchers, conservation groups, agencies, and others to protect the ecosystem and sustain livelihoods?
- If yes, what topics are important to discuss? and

- If yes, what kind of processes, information, and actions are needed to support collaboration.

OWRD sent a letter to Oregon Tribes to seek their interest in participating and, if so, how they would like to participate in this assessment. Representatives from the Burns Paiute Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs were interviewed. The assessment was completed in early 2023 and is available [online](#).

The 2023 Legislature appropriated \$420k to Portland State University to facilitate a collaborative process to identify broadly supported actions to meet water needs in the Chewaucan River watershed. The [Partnership for Lake Abert and the Chewaucan](#) has met quarterly from 2023-2025. The group in 2025 the Partnership conducted and initial scoping of the early actions the group wants to take and identified priority areas for those actions for the 2025-2027 workplan. Representatives from OWRD and several other agencies, as well as representatives from the Burns Paiute Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Klamath Tribes, have participated in or are actively involved in this process.

Funding Programs

OWRD engages with Tribes on four funding programs: (1) Feasibility Study Grants, (2) Water Project Grants and Loans, (3) Irrigation Modernization Funding, and (4) Domestic Water Well Funding.

Feasibility Study Grants: [Feasibility Study Grants](#) provide funds to assess water conservation, reuse, and storage projects. These grants are designed to fund 50 percent of the qualifying costs of feasibility studies and Tribes are eligible to apply.

During each application period, OWRD staff contact Tribal staff to solicit input as well as offer to consult through the Director's office on the applications and funding recommendations for its Feasibility Study Grant funding opportunities. In November 2024, OWRD staff invited Tribes to apply for the 2024-2025 offering of Feasibility Study Grants. In March 2025, OWRD reached out to all nine Tribes requesting comments and inviting coordination and consultation on the five study applications received. OWRD received no comments from Tribes on the study applications. In July 2025, OWRD reached out to all nine Tribes requesting comments and inviting coordination and consultation on the Application Review Team's funding recommendations. OWRD received no comments from Tribes on the funding recommendations. In September 2025, OWRD followed up with all nine Tribes to inform them of the funding awards made by the Water Resources Commission.

Water Project Grants and Loans and Irrigation Modernization Funding: [Water Project Grants and Loans](#) (WPGL) provide funds through a competitive process for a variety of instream and out-of-stream water projects with economic, environmental, and community benefits. These grants require a 25 percent cost match, and Tribes are eligible to apply.

In 2023, House Bill 5030 authorized \$50 million in funding for irrigation modernization projects that leverage federal funding associated with Natural Resources Conservation Service authorized watershed plans, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART grants, or U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grants that are eligible to be on the Department of Environmental Quality's Intended Use Plan. Per the authorizing bill, the projects must also produce the economic, environmental, and community benefits described in the authorizing statute for OWRD's WPGL funding opportunity (ORS 541.673). The Irrigation Modernization Funding is run through the existing WPGL program and funding cycles for WPGL and Irrigation Modernization Funding are run concurrently.

During each application period, OWRD staff contact Tribal staff to solicit input as well as offer to consult through the Director's office. OWRD offers several ways that Tribes may participate and review applications for Water Project Grants and Loans and Irrigation Modernization Funding. Based on input from Tribes and the LCIS, OWRD's current process for each funding cycle includes contacting LCIS and asking them to identify which applications may be of interest to each Tribe, based on a project's location. OWRD then contacts each Tribe identified by LCIS and provides relevant information regarding the project proposal(s) and access to the application(s). This includes project type, project summary, the county, the nearest city, and a link to the application where applicants list all ground-disturbing activity by tax lot.

Opportunities offered to Tribes to engage in the review process include:

- Providing comment during the initial 60-day public comment period on applications;
- Serving as a member of the Technical Review Team (TRT) to review, score, and rank applications;
- Providing government-to-government comments on the application(s) for consideration by the TRT during scoring;
- Providing government-to-government comments for consideration by OWRD and the Water Resources Commission on funding recommendations; and
- Providing comment during the public comment period on the TRT ranking and funding recommendations.

OWRD offered one WPGL and two Irrigation Modernization Funding cycles in 2025. During the first 2025 funding cycle, OWRD did not solicit WPGL applications due to insufficient funds. OWRD received four Irrigation Modernization Funding applications. LCIS determined that eight of the nine Tribes may have an interest in one or more Irrigation Modernization Funding project application. In February 2025, an invitation was sent to the identified Tribes detailing the opportunities listed above as ways they could choose to participate in the review process. OWRD did not receive any comments from Tribes on the project applications.

In March 2025, OWRD reached out to all nine Tribes to invite them to attend the multi-agency TRT meeting, where the project proposals were scored and ranked based on potential public benefits in three categories: economic, environmental, and social/cultural. OWRD practice is to share all comments with the TRT to be considered as they score and rank

projects and develop a funding recommendation list. In April 2025, OWRD reached out to all nine Tribes requesting comments and inviting coordination and consultation on the TRT's funding recommendations. OWRD did not receive any comments from Tribes on the projects recommended for funding. In June 2025, OWRD followed up with all nine Tribes to inform them of the funding awards made by the Water Resources Commission.

During the second 2025 funding cycle, OWRD received six WPGL applications and three Irrigation Modernization Funding applications. LCIS determined that eight of the nine Tribes may have an interest in one or more WPGL or Irrigation Modernization Funding project application. In August 2025, an invitation was sent to the identified Tribes detailing the opportunities listed above as ways they could choose to participate in the review process. OWRD received no comments from Tribes on the project applications.

In September 2025, OWRD reached out to all nine Tribes to invite them to attend the multi-agency TRT meeting where the project proposals were scored and ranked based on potential public benefits in three categories: economic, environmental, and social/cultural. In October 2025, OWRD reached out to all nine Tribes requesting comments and inviting coordination and consultation on the TRT's funding recommendations. OWRD did not receive any comments from Tribes on the projects recommended for funding. Later in December, OWRD will follow up with all nine Tribes to inform them of the funding awards approved by the Water Resources Commission during the Commission's December 11-12, 2025 meeting. OWRD anticipates the Commission will award the remaining Irrigation Modernization Funds (\$4,303,179) and OWRD will not offer Irrigation Modernization funding cycles in 2026.

2025-26 Funding Program Updates: House Bill 3364 (2025) introduces several updates to the WPGL program:

- The public comment period for applications has been reduced from 60 days to 30 days to streamline the review timeline.
- For applicants required to have a Water Management and Conservation Plan, the plan must be approved prior to the funding decision, rather than approved at the application deadline.
- Eligible expenses have been expanded to include long-term monitoring of compliance with Seasonally Varying Flows (SVF).
- The bill clarifies that SVF conditions may be applied to the underlying water right, rather than only to aquifer storage and recovery or aquifer recharge permits.
- The funding recommendation process has been revised: previously, the TRT made funding recommendations directly to the Commission. Under the new process, TRT recommendations go to the Department, which then considers both the TRT input and public comments before making final funding recommendations to the Commission.

In addition, the bill established a reporting requirement to the Legislature and the Commission every eight years for the Place-Based Planning Fund, Feasibility Study Grants, Water Project Grant and Loans, and the Well Abandonment, Repair and Replacement Fund.

In October 2025, OWRD announced the first 2026 Water Project Grants and Loans funding cycle. Applications will be accepted through a new [online grant platform](#) with submissions due on January 21, 2026. OWRD anticipates having approximately \$2M available for the first 2026 funding cycle pending a spring 2026 lottery revenue bond sale.

Domestic Water Well Funds: [Water Well Abandonment, Repair and Replacement Fund \(WARRF\)](#): In June 2022, OWRD launched the Water Well Abandonment Repair and Replacement Fund (WARRF). This program provides grants up to \$40,000 to help qualifying low- to moderate-income homeowners or members of a federally recognized Tribe in Oregon experiencing well water supply issues. Grants can help with the cost of repairing or abandoning and replacing a dry well or a well that was damaged or destroyed by wildfire.

OWRD stopped accepting applications in March 2025 after all available funds were awarded. However, the program will reopen in November 2025, with new funding authorized during the 2025 legislative session. Applications will be accepted on an ongoing basis through a new [online grant platform](#).

OWRD prioritizes funding assistance for low-to-moderate income households during the first phase of the program. These impacted households are prioritized to meet urgent public health needs and based on the direction from the Oregon Legislature during the December 2021 special session. OWRD anticipates additional wells will be eligible for funding in the future.

Harney Domestic Well Remediation Fund: In February 2024, OWRD launched the Harney Domestic Well Remediation Fund (HDWF). HDWF funding helps qualifying individual homeowners or members of a federally recognized Tribe in the Greater Harney Valley Groundwater Area of Concern with a portion of the cost to repair or replace and permanently abandon household wells that were impacted by declining groundwater levels.

OWRD prioritizes funding based on whether the well is able to sustain the household or at risk of going dry, whether the property is owner-occupied, and if the landowner's household is low-to-moderate income. In October 2025, OWRD announced the opening of a new funding cycle. Applications will be accepted through January 30, 2026, through a new [online grant platform](#).

OTHER WORK WITH INDIVIDUAL TRIBES

In addition to efforts outlined above, OWRD has engaged with individual Oregon Tribes on specific issues involving water rights, water management and use, planning, and funding. These efforts are outlined below.

Burns Paiute Tribe

As summarized below, OWRD has engaged with the Burns Paiute Tribe on water rights, watershed enhancement, the Harney Basin Groundwater Study and Rulemaking, and the Harney's Water Future place-based planning effort.

Water Rights: OWRD has worked with the Burns Paiute Tribe on general water rights issues, including transfer applications and groundwater planning. In 2023, OWRD issued a final order for an instream lease renewal between the Tribe and the Freshwater Trust (IL-1693). The instream lease is in effect through September 30, 2027, and provides for the conservation,

maintenance, and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat. Trout Unlimited is now working with the Tribe instead of the Freshwater Trust.

Water Management and Water Use Regulation: During briefings and consultation with the Department on multiple issues, the Tribe has reiterated its ongoing interest in pursuing a co-management agreement with the Department and other entities pertaining to the Harney Basin. The Department anticipates further discussions about this topic in early 2026.

Harney's Water Future Place-Based Planning: Since 2016, OWRD has provided funding, technical assistance, and planning support to undertake [place-based integrated water resources planning](#) in the Harney Basin. Through this planning process, partners developed strategies to meet current and future instream and out-of-stream water needs. A representative from the Burns Paiute Tribe actively participated on the coordinating committee and on the instream workgroup during plan development. In September 2025, the Collaborative completed an [integrated water resources plan](#) and received state-recognition from the Oregon Water Resources Commission (OWRC). Implementation meetings are anticipated to begin in early 2026. As part of the plan's implementation strategy, the collaborative will continue to try to work with the Burns Paiute Tribe to ensure that plan strategies addressing instream and other water needs are implemented.

Division 512 Rulemaking: In August 2024, the Burns Paiute Tribe notified the Department of interest in meeting with the Director and staff during a regularly scheduled Tribal Council work session to discuss Harney Basin groundwater management. Scheduling was difficult for both the Department and the Tribe going into the holiday season and legislative session. In early April, Harney County experienced historic flooding resulting from heavy rains and a failing levee; many residents were forced to evacuate, including Tribal members. The Burns Paiute Indian Reservation was heavily impacted, and rebuilding and recovery efforts remain an ongoing high priority for the Tribe. On April 7, 2025, the Director sent a follow up letter to the Burns Paiute Tribe, offering dates and times that might be convenient for the Tribal Council, once flood recovery was further along. Consultation regarding the Division 512 rulemaking effort occurred on August 12, August 29, and September 29 of 2025. On October 15, 2025, the Department provided a briefing outside the rulemaking's public comment period. During these meetings, the Tribe sought exemption from the Division 512 rules pertaining to groundwater controls measures in the proposed Harney Basin Critical Groundwater Area as well as a commitment from the Department to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement to co-manage the water resources in the Basin. The Department revised the rules in response to the Tribe's input, exempting the Tribe from the corrective control measures and measuring and reporting requirements contained in the Division 512 rules; the final rules, including the Tribal exemptions, were adopted by the Water Resources Commission on December 11. The Department will meet with the Tribe in early 2026 to explore co-management opportunities in the Harney Basin.

Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw

Water Management and Water Use Regulation: OWRD staff continued to engage with the Confederated Tribes around Rock Creek Fish Hatchery operations. Additionally, D-15 staff coordinated and administered water withdrawals on Tribal Lands.

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

Water Rights: OWRD has worked with the Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde on general water rights issues, including transfer applications. On January 10, 2025, the Tribe submitted transfer application T-14592 proposing to change the place of use for two water right certificates. On October 28, 2025, the Department issued a preliminary determination proposing to approve T-14592 and is currently in a protest waiting period.

On March 27, 2025, the Tribe also submitted a groundwater registration modification T-14634, proposing to change the place of use and character of use of a groundwater registration claim. This application is still being processed.

Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

Mid-Coast Water Planning Partnership (PBWP): Since 2016, OWRD has awarded grants and participated in collaborative integrated water resources planning and implementation in the Mid-Coast region. During the planning phase (2016-2022), a representative from the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians participated as a member of the coordinating committee and the Mid-Coast Water Planning Partnership. Recognized by the OWRC as an integrated water resources plan, the [Mid-Coast Water Action Plan](#) is a framework and pathway for addressing water supply and use challenges in the region, and sustainably balancing water needs for people and native fish and wildlife. The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians continued to participate in monthly workgroup meetings held during 2023-2024. During this time, partners prioritized a suite of actions to pursue and developed workplans to guide implementation priorities. In 2025, the Partnership pursued implementation funding during the 2025 Legislative Session. Although unsuccessful, partners did secure a small grant from the Roundhouse Foundation to host partnership meetings, educational tours, and kayak floats on coastal waterways (e.g., Siletz, Alsea, Yaquina, & Salmon Rivers) to learn about water issues and watershed health. In September, Mid-Coast partners, including the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, visited a habitat restoration project on Beaver Creek to see how beavers are creating natural storage on the landscape.

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

The State of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, federal agencies, and irrigation districts have worked for over 30 years to improve the Umatilla River Basin's water supply for farmers and ranchers, fish and wildlife, and the community. As part of the water supply efforts underway in the Umatilla Basin, OWRD is working with representatives of several federal agencies, the Oregon Department of Justice (ODOJ), and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to achieve a shared goal of satisfying the region's long-term water needs. OWRD continues to provide water rights information to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and have offered to meet as needed.

Water Rights: In the Wallowa River Basin, staff have worked with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and Trout Unlimited on a series of complex transactions, which included instream leases and Allocation of Conserved Water (ACW) projects. The ACW projects have been completed, and instream water right certificates were issued.

On August 8, 2025, the Department issued an order of finalization for ACW-105 for the Tribe, which involved three water rights; protecting 1.138 cubic feet/second (cfs) of water instream in the Walla Walla River.

In 2025, OWRD issued three final orders approving Instream Lease applications involving private landowners and Trout Unlimited, while also working with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Instream Lease IL-1864, IL-1984 and IL-2099 were in effect during the 2025 irrigation season only. And one final order involving Instream Lease IL-2067 that was submitted by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation was approved and is in effect March 1, 2025, through October 31, 2029.

Additionally, The Confederated tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation were interested parties to Instream Lease IL-2010, IL-2012, SL-65, and SL-64 which are in effect March 1, 2024, through October 31, 2028. All instream leases provide for the conservation, maintenance, and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat.

OWRD holds voluntary monthly meetings with the Restoration Partners (Trout Unlimited and many others) to discuss ongoing projects, proposed projects, and other issues as they arise. A representative from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation regularly attends these meetings.

OWRD has also been working with Wallowa Lake Irrigation District, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and ODFW regarding instream releases from Wallowa Lake Reservoir after rehabilitation of the existing dam. Wallowa Lake Irrigation District filed Transfer Application T-13931 on February 25, 2022, proposing to change the character of use for which water is stored under Storage Certificate 2949 in Wallowa Lake to Multipurpose Use. On November 21, 2022, OWRD issued a Preliminary Determination (PD) proposing to approve Transfer Application T-13931. A timely protest of the PD was filed on December 29, 2022. The protest is currently in the queue of protests awaiting referral to the Office of Administrative Hearings for a contested case hearing.

Umatilla Basin Water Rights Settlement: OWRD, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, ODOJ, a federal negotiation team, and the Westland Irrigation District initiated formal water rights settlement negotiations in June 2012. Discussions include protecting instream flows for fisheries and cultural traditions, while maintaining stability for agriculture and municipal needs. Negotiations also include other irrigation interests, including Stanfield Irrigation District, Hermiston Irrigation District, West Extension Irrigation District and a number of smaller irrigators along the Umatilla River.

OWRD has continued to engage with Tribal staff to support the Tribal water settlement work. Staff have met with Tribal staff and trade parties several times over 2025 and have finalized the settlement agreement. Negotiations are ongoing and formal outreach is expected to begin in mid-2026.

Water Management and Water Use Regulation: OWRD provided the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation with periodic updates on the Umatilla Water Supply Project and associated applications for new water rights out of the Columbia River.

Through the North Central Region and East Region offices, OWRD and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation together are

- continuing to discuss water management and monitoring in the Walla Walla Basin, including discussions related to instream flow in the Walla Walla River;
- attending Umatilla River Operations Group meetings to share information regarding the protection of instream water right flows and irrigation demands;
- coordinating on McKay Reservoir storage allotments, including the amount of water released and remaining in McKay Reservoir;
- working on water management issues related to the operation of the Umatilla Basin Project Exchange, including coordinating canal startups and shutdowns to reduce the potential for fish take;
- conducting a gaging program in the Grande Ronde Basin that is largely beneficial to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and results in periodic consultation and/or collaboration associated with Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's stream habitat projects;
- coordinating with Tribal Cultural Resources staff on the installation of a "near real-time" gaging station on McKay Creek in Crook County; and
- monitoring and protecting instream leases negotiated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Walla Walla Basin Initiatives: During 2025, OWRD collaborated with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation on several initiatives benefitting the Walla Walla Basin. As a member of the Walla Walla Basin Advisory Committee, OWRD is working in cooperation with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Washington Department of Ecology, and other Committee members to evaluate strategies for restoring instream flows for fish in the Walla Walla River.

OWRD is working with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and Washington's Department of Ecology to explore opportunities to work together as co-managers of water in the Walla Walla Basin. The three sovereigns met several times throughout 2023⁵ to discuss both groundwater and surface water management goals.

OWRD, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, USGS, and Washington Department of Ecology are engaged in a cooperative study of the groundwater systems of the Walla Walla Basin. Ongoing data collection efforts include monitoring quarterly bi-state groundwater levels and surface water flows, conducting seepage runs along major stream systems, and sampling surface and groundwater for naturally occurring tracer chemicals.

OWRD will continue to engage with the State of Washington and the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation in high-level discussions on the mutual interests of water management across the Oregon-Washington state line.

Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership (PBWP): Since 2016, OWRD has provided funding, technical assistance, and planning support for collaborative place-based integrated water resources planning in the Upper Grande Ronde River watershed. During this planning process,

the [Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership](#) developed strategies to meet their instream and out-of-stream water needs. In early 2022, the Partnership completed an [integrated water resources plan](#) and received state-recognition from the OWRC. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation continues to participate actively in the Upper Grande Ronde quarterly planning meetings to ensure that strategies from the plan that address instream and other water needs are implemented.

Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon

Water Rights: OWRD has continued communication with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs in 2025 involving discussions around general water right questions, transfer applications, instream lease applications and to discuss the Tribes' preferences for receiving notifications.

During 2025, OWRD continued to work with the Tribes to facilitate improved mutual understanding, coordination, and implementation of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation Water Right Settlement Agreement (November 17, 1997). Discussions have largely focused on process improvement for noticing the Tribes of proposed water right transactions and on examination of OWRD's injury evaluation process to ensure alignment with the Settlement Agreement stipulation that tribal reserved water rights shall not be injured as a result of transfer applications in the Deschutes Basin.

During 2025, in coordination with the Tribes, the Department issued fourteen final orders approving transfer applications involving private landowners and entities. The Tribes provided the Department with letters of non-objection for all of these approved transfers.

During 2025, in coordination with the Tribes, the Department issued thirty final orders approving instream lease applications involving private landowners and the Deschutes River Conservancy. The Tribes provided letters of non-objection for all of these approved instream leases.

Instream Lease IL-1818 and IL-2111 are in effect from during the irrigation seasons of 2025 through 2029; IL-1837 is in effect during the storage season of 2025-2030; IL-2124 is in effect during the irrigation seasons of 2025 through 2027; IL-1975, IL-2036, IL-2075, IL-2077, IL-2082, IL-2083, IL-2084, IL-2085, IL-2086, IL-2087, IL-2090, IL-2092, IL-2096, IL-2106, IL-2107, IL-2108, IL-2109, IL-2110, IL-2114, IL-2115, IL-2117, IL-2118, IL-2122, IL-2123, IL-2125, IL-2129 were all in effect during the 2025 irrigation season only.

Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative (PBWP): OWRD continues to participate in the [Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative \(DBWC\)](#), a PBWP effort convened by the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council and the Deschutes River Conservancy. Bobby Brunoe of the CTWS has contributed valuable guidance to the planning process since DBWC's inception, including through participation on DBWC's Planning Team and Working Group, and as a former co-chair of the collaborative.

Water Management and Water Use Regulation: OWRD's 2023 engagement with the Tribes on issues relating to water management and water use included the following:

- Signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between OWRD and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, which led to the purchase of equipment to install a new stream gaging station on Lower Fifteenmile Creek. The operation of the gaging station is ongoing.
- Continued monitoring of the flow at the Pine Creek Gage near Clarno by the District 21 Watermaster's Office. This monitoring is related to the transfer of irrigation certificates C-25617, 25332, 25333, 25334, 25335, 25365, 25462, and 25523 from Pine Creek with priority dates ranging from 1870–1880 to instream rights resulting in Certificate C-85824.
- Continued cooperation between the District 3 Watermaster's Office in The Dalles and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. Flow meters have been installed and data are being collected on significant diversions on Fifteenmile Creek. Seasonal use and streamflow data are available to the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and others.

Lower John Day Place-Based Planning (PBWP): Since 2016, OWRD has provided funding, technical assistance, and planning support for collaborative place-based integrated water resources planning in the Lower John Day Basin. Through this planning process, the [Lower John Day Place-Based Partnership](#) developed [an integrated plan](#) that was recognized by the OWRC in early 2022. The planning collaborative continues to meet to coordinate implementation of the plan. The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWS) has participated in the planning partnership since its inception and continues to provide guidance as needed in the implementation process.

Coquille Indian Tribe

Water Management and Water Use Regulation: As part of the Governor's [Southern Oregon Regional Solutions Team](#) and Advisory Committee, OWRD coordinates with Tribes and other local leaders on community and economic development that brings together Tribes, local governments, and the public and private sectors to advance projects, solve problems, seize opportunities, and respond to emerging local needs.

Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians

Water Management and Water Use Regulation: OWRD staff have engaged with the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Indians as partners in the [Inland Rogue Water Resiliency Group](#), a collaborative initiative aimed at improving water management and sustainability in the inland Rogue region, primarily in Jackson and Josephine Counties. Other activities include working with the Tribe on access and monitoring of the Table Rock Ditch as well as fostering communication between the Tribe and the Jackson County Roads Division concerning water withdrawals on Tribal lands.

As part of the Governor's [Southern Oregon Regional Solutions Team](#) and Advisory Committee, OWRD coordinates with Tribes and other local leaders on community and economic development that brings together Tribes, local governments, and the public and private sectors to advance projects, solve problems, seize opportunities, and respond to emerging local needs.

Klamath Tribes

Water Rights: During the past year, OWRD has continued to engage in discussions on water-related issues in the Klamath Basin. These talks have included the Klamath Tribes of Oregon along with three tribes in California. The issues continue to focus on streamflow, water quality, and fish. These efforts are focused on identifying projects that will increase stream flows and Upper Klamath Lake elevation, improve water quality, and restore riparian corridors. Recognizing the cultural significance of the endangered sucker to the Klamath Tribes and the Tribes' desire to address water quality, OWRD has participated in many of the proposed restoration conversations. Since the 2024 removal of four Klamath River dams, fall chinook are actively recolonizing Basin rivers and tributaries upstream of Upper Klamath Lake. Consequently, OWRD is enforcing the Tribes' determined instream claims at stream flows that are more protective of anadromous salmon and steelhead. Additionally, OWRD has invested many hours working with out-of-stream water users to increase instream flows through temporary and permanent instream transfers.

In 2025, the District 17 Watermaster's office regulated junior water users to protect Tribal determined claims for instream flows. Also in 2025, the Watermaster's office regulated junior users to the Tribe's Upper Klamath Lake lake-level determined claim. The Watermaster's office investigated, validated, and regulated water use resulting from calls for water made by the Klamath Tribes and Bureau of Indian Affairs to satisfy the Tribes' determined claims contained in the Amended and Corrected Finding of Fact and Order of Determination (ACFFOD) in the Klamath Adjudication. During 2025, the District 17 Watermaster continued the weekly conversations with the Tribal liaison. These conversations provided for a timelier response to Tribal questions and concerns.

Additionally, OWRD staff continued to respond to questions from Tribal members regarding regulation activities relating to water rights priority dates, instream flow needs, irrigation needs, and other general topics related to the ACFFOD.

Water Management and Water Use Regulation: OWRD has engaged with the Klamath Tribes to learn about gaging history and potential cooperation in areas of overlapping interest on the upper Sycan River and Long Creek.

OREGON WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT POLICY ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRIBES

The Water Resources Commission and Department will communicate and collaboratively problem-solve with the nine Oregon Tribes. The Water Resources Department has established the following guidelines to foster and maintain its relationship with each of the nine Tribes:

1. Maintain parallel contact directories: (1) Agency personnel available to the Tribe(s) for immediate contact, and (2) A list of tribal leaders or staff who can be contacted to initiate discussion quickly. (In the Department's case, the initial contact is at our Regional office, with a Salem office follow-up.)
2. Spot issues quickly and get accurate details as soon as possible. That is, be aware of water use issues that may create conflict between the state government and a Tribe or the federal government as the Tribe's trustee. Once the issue is identified, research the details both factual and legal so that the issue can be scoped and accurate, and appropriate contact can be initiated.
3. When an issue arises, Department staff will offer to meet face-to-face with Tribal leadership as soon as possible to ensure that clear, constructive communication is initiated promptly.
4. During initial contact on an issue, be positive and stress common interests and goals indicating that a cooperative solution is most likely possible.
5. Keep the agencies' other (non-Indian) constituents advised, and where appropriate involve the non-Indian community in discussions with the Tribal leadership.
6. As issues arise and are addressed, establish a system or protocol for future issues—building on successes.

The Department believes that its relationship with Oregon's nine Tribes must be based on two essential attributes. First, we must honor and protect existing Tribal water rights to the use of water, and second, we must continue to forge partnerships with Tribes to support our mutual interest in water issues.