

# Harney Basin Serious Water Management Problem Area

Oregon Water Resources Department

Jason Spriet and Amanda Lowe

June 9, 2026



# Presentation Outline

- SWMPA designation overview
- Harney Basin SWMPA
- Measuring Device Requirements
- Information & Resources
- What's next



# Regulatory Groundwater Control Tools That Will Be Used

Regulatory Tool	Description	Strategy	What does it control?
Classification	Classify type and quantity of water use allowed	Protect recharge	Future groundwater appropriation
Critical Groundwater Area (CGWA)	Control current groundwater use to prevent further decline	Reduce groundwater use	Current groundwater use
Serious Water Management Problem Area (SWMPA)	Require reporting and measurement of water use	Achieve accountable water use	Current and future groundwater use

# **Serious Water Management Problem Area (SWMPA) Overview**

---

# What is a SWMPA?

- Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 540.435 and Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) 690-085 authorizes the Oregon Water Resources Commission to go through a rulemaking process to identify and designate areas where water concerns are significant enough to warrant special attention and potentially stricter management practices. Serious Water Management Problem Area (SWMPA) requirements can be applied to current and future water use, whether it is surface water, groundwater, or both.

# SWMPA Designation Requirement: Criteria

## Criteria for SWMPA Designation

Ground water declines are occurring that don't recover annually.

There are frequent water management disputes between users.

Substantial interference exists between wells.

Ground water use is interfering with flow of water in a nearby stream, to the detriment of senior surface water rights.

The diversion of water from streams is in such quantities that interference with nearby wells occurs.

There are frequent shortages of surface or ground water.

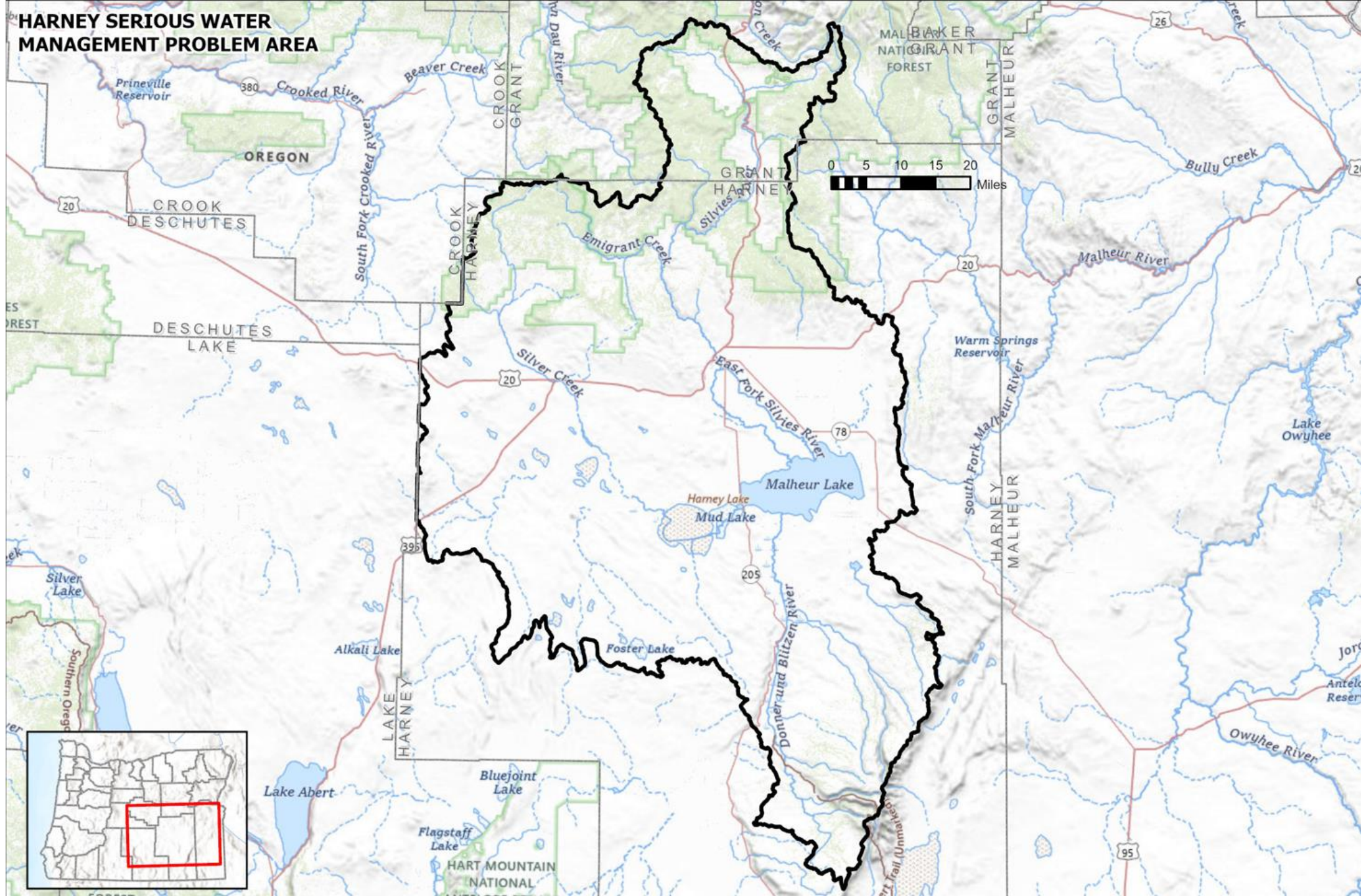
# Can a SWMPA Designation Be Removed?

- The Commission has the authority to remove a SWMPA designation through additional rulemaking processes if water use measurement is no longer needed

# Harney Basin SWMPA

---

# HARNEY SERIOUS WATER MANAGEMENT PROBLEM AREA



# Harney SWMPA Designation

- The Harney basin was the second SWMPA designation in the state.
- **Criteria met:** Groundwater levels were declining and not recovering each year. There are frequent occurrences of surface or ground water shortages caused by use of water from streams or wells. Shortages may be evidenced by complaints from water right holders, requests to regulate water use, degraded water quality, or failure to meet administrative restrictions or minimum streamflows.
- **Public Hearing:** Public hearings were held in June & August 2025
- **Rule adoption:** Rules were adopted in December 2025. Effective January 14, 2026.

# Rule Requirements

---

# Measurement Device Requirements

- By March 1, 2028, all groundwater rights holders, well owners, and well operators within the SWMPA boundary must install and maintain a totalizing flow meter on each well listed as a Point of Appropriation (POA).
- Flowmeter must be installed according to specifications, maintained in good working order and must be accessible by Department
- Failure to install may result in shut off of well and assessment of civil penalties

# Measuring Device Requirements

A **totalizing flow meter shall meet the following** specifications:

- Flow meter shall have a rated accuracy of plus or minus 2 percent of actual flow for all flow rates for which the meter is expected to measure;
- Flow meter shall measure the entire discharge from the well;
- Flow meter shall have a visual display and shall be equipped with a sweep hand or digital readout so that instantaneous flow rate can be read;
- Flow meter shall have sufficient capacity to record at minimum the quantity of water authorized to be pumped over a period of 2 years. Units of water measurement shall be in acre-feet, cubic-feet, or gallons, and the totalizer shall read directly in one of these units. Flow meters recording in acre-feet shall, at a minimum, read to the nearest 1/10th acre-foot, and the decimal multiplier shall be clearly indicated on the face of the register head;

# Measuring Device Requirements

## Totalizing flow meter operational requirements:

- Totalizers on each meter shall not be field reset without notice to and written permission from the local watermaster. Prior to resetting the totalizers, the final reading must be recorded and reported;
- Flow meter shall be installed in accordance with all manufacturer specifications. There shall be no turnouts or diversions between the well and the flow meter; and
- Flow meter shall be installed no more than 100 feet from the well head unless an exception is approved by the watermaster in writing.

# Reporting Requirement

- Data must be:
  - Recorded monthly
  - Reported annually by December 31<sup>st</sup>
  - Reports shall be submitted using a form developed and maintained by the Department

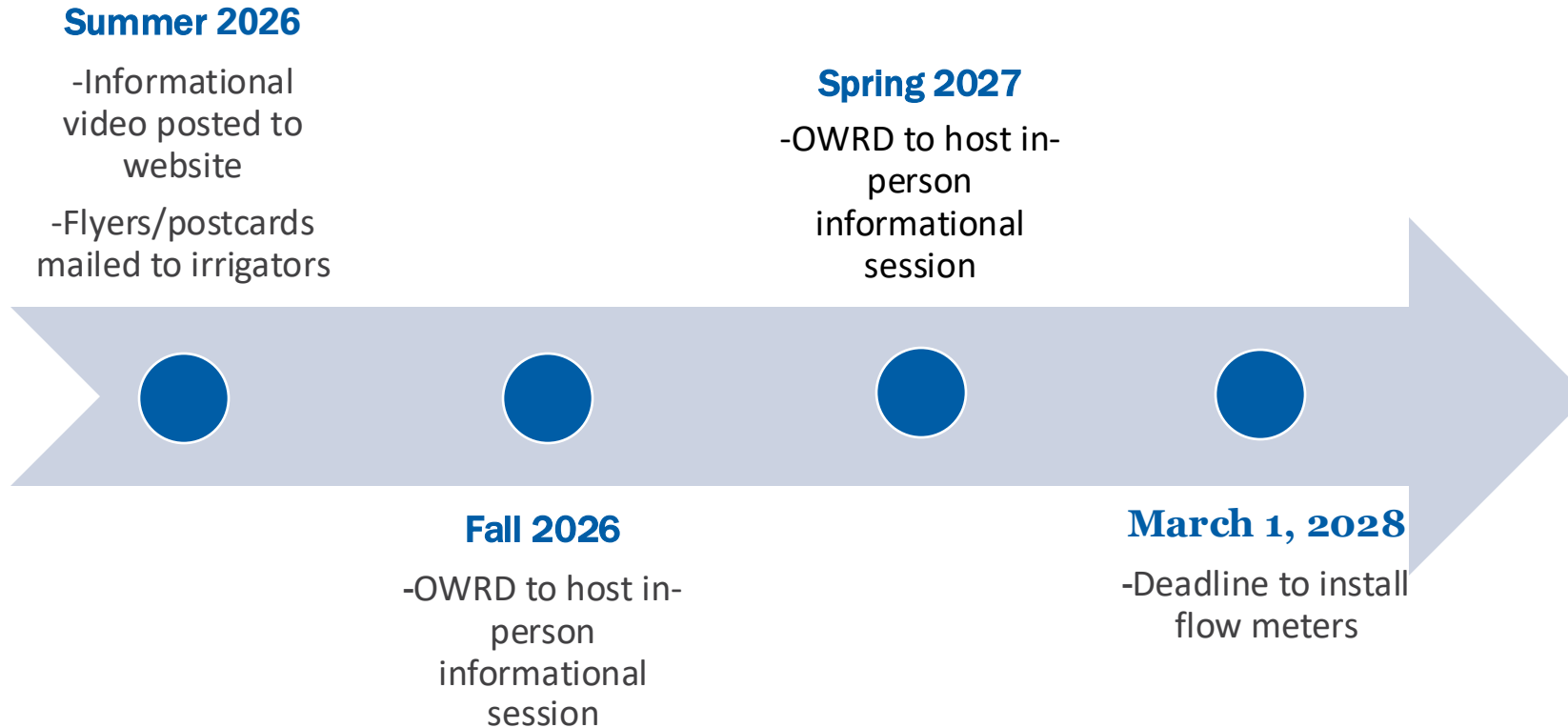
# Non-Functioning Flowmeters

- Non-functioning meters must be reported within 48 hours of discovery
- Water may not be used for more than 60 days following the discovery of a non-functioning meter
- Monthly measurement still required
- Report repair of meter within 48 hours

# Information & Resources

---

# Initial Outreach Milestones



# OWRD Water Measurement Cost Share Program

- OWRD has a water measurement cost-share program for installing water measurement devices.
- Funding is available for purchase and installation of measurement devices on wells or surface water diversions. Statewide program applications are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- OWRD provides 75% cost share
- The application can be found here:

<https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/GWWL/WCC/Documents/WMCS%20application%20-%20blank.pdf>

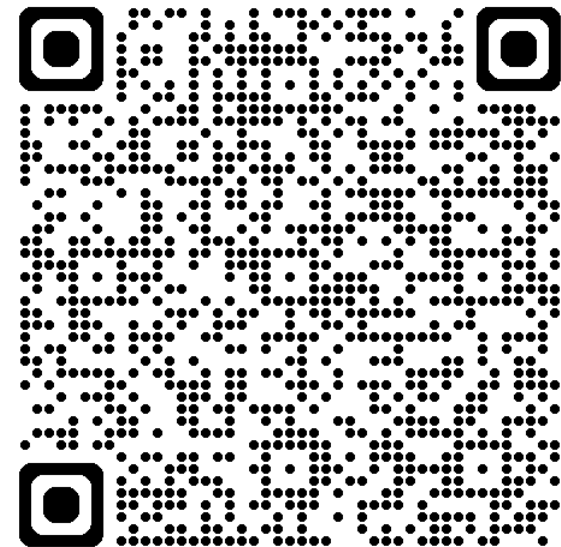
# More Info Online

Today's presentation will be posted online, with other information about the Harney Basin SWMPA, accessible here:

Link:

[https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/administrative\\_basins/malheur-lake-basin/harney-basin/SWMPA/Pages/ioidefault.aspx](https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/administrative_basins/malheur-lake-basin/harney-basin/SWMPA/Pages/ioidefault.aspx)

Or scan the QR code:



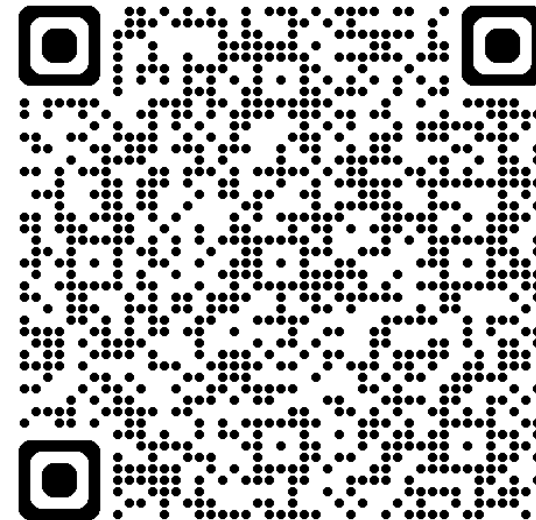
# New Harney Basin Homepage!

OWRD has a new homepage where we will post information about the implementation of the Division 512 rules. We encourage folks to check this page often for relevant updates and event information to stay informed!

**Link:**

**<https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/administrative-basins/malheur-lake-basin/harney-basin/Pages/default.aspx>**

**Or scan the QR code:**



OREGON



WATER RESOURCES  
DEPARTMENT

# Thank you!

For more information or questions about the Harney Basin, contact:

**East Region Manager**

Jason Spriet (541) 523-8224

or

**Local Watermaster**

Donald Swindlehurst (541) 573-2591



[Oregon.gov/owrd](https://Oregon.gov/owrd)



[@OregonGovWRD](https://www.youtube.com/@OregonGovWRD)



[Linkedin.com/company/owrd](https://www.linkedin.com/company/owrd)