



# Water Rotation Agreements

*A potential topic for rulemaking in 2026-27*

Oregon law allows landowners to enter into written agreements with the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to rotate use of a collective set of water rights they hold. The rotation agreement allows the water users to make the most out of limited supplies of water and address system needs by providing water to certain permitted parties at certain times. This could be upstream users passing water when not their turn in rotation so that downstream users may pick up or play out on a jointly owned ditch system similarly. The watermaster will distribute water in accordance with the submitted rotation agreement for the set time of that agreement which must be for one irrigation season, at minimum.

## Why this topic is important in water management

Water rotation agreements provide water right holders the flexibility to navigate changes in water supply by working with other water users. As water becomes scarcer, they may be an increasingly important tool for meeting water needs.

## Current authorities

**The following are the statute(s) and rule(s) that define rotation agreements and give OWRD the authority to regulate according to a rotation agreement.**

**Statute – ORS 540.150** To bring about a more economical use of the available water supply, water users owning lands to which are attached water rights may rotate in the use of the supply to which they may be collectively entitled. Whenever two or more water users notify the watermaster that they desire to use the water by rotation and present a written agreement as to the manner of rotation, the watermaster shall distribute the water in accordance with the written agreement.

**Rule – OAR 690-250-0010** (6) “Enforceable Rotation Agreement”: Written agreement between two or more appropriators to rotate the use of water, to bring about more economical use of the available supply to which they are collectively entitled.

**Rule – OAR 690-250-0080** (1) Appropriators may rotate use of the supply to which they may be collectively entitled. The nature of potential agreements are subject to the limitations in section (3) of this rule.

(2) An agreement shall identify the duration of the agreement which shall be no less than one irrigation season. The agreement shall not be terminated within an irrigation season, and the rotation agreement shall be signed by all participants and dated. A copy of the agreement shall be filed with the watermaster for the area. Unless the rotation agreement provides otherwise, any member of the agreement may notify the watermaster after the end of the irrigation season, and before the beginning of the next season’s use, that they are terminating the agreement.

(3) A watermaster shall distribute water only under those enforceable agreements that include the provisions of section (2) of this rule. A watermaster shall not implement a rotation agreement that violates existing water statutes, court decrees, instream water rights, minimum flows, other rules of the Commission, or interferes with the rights of any appropriator not a member of such agreement. If distribution of water by the rotation agreement requires substantially more of the watermaster’s time than distribution among the relative priorities, then the watermaster may require payment by the appropriators for an assistant watermaster, as described in ORS 540.100.

(4) The agreement may contain language describing how a call from an appropriator or minimum flow senior to one or more appropriators in the rotation will be honored.

**What is a statute?** A law enacted by Oregon legislature that provides, directs or authorizes Department activity.

**What is a rule?** Any agency directive, standard, regulation or statement of general applicability that implements, interprets or prescribes law or policy, or describes the procedure or practice requirements of any agency.

## Why new or amended rules may be needed

Updating the rules to clarify or otherwise improve rotation agreement requirements and how these agreements are reviewed and enforced would make the process smoother for both water users and agency staff. For example, requiring people to submit their rotational agreements a set number of days in advance would give staff enough time to check that everything is complete and to prepare for water distribution. Clarifying the payment requirements as outlined in ORS 540.100 may be also helpful.

## Share Your Thoughts on Rotation Agreements

### Feedback Opportunity:

If requirements for rotation agreements are refined, OWRD wants to identify reasonable timeframes and sideboards that balance preserving flexibility for users with what OWRD staff need to review and prepare to distribute according to a written agreement. Therefore, we are interested in learning:

- **How far in advance do you or would you set up a rotation agreement?**
- **How would you improve the rotation agreement process?**

Scan the QR code to add your thoughts on Mentimeter or write your thoughts on a sticky note and add it to the poster board.



OWRD is interested in hearing your thoughts on this topic as part of its scoping efforts for this rulemaking. OWRD reviews all feedback to understand community concerns, identify potential impacts, and determine scope and content of rules, considering this input alongside legal requirements, scientific data, and policy goals. While not every suggestion can be incorporated due to statutory requirements, scientific constraints, and policy obligations, community feedback helps OWRD ensure the final rules are clear, practical, and appropriately responsive to the public's needs.

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