



UPDATE OREGON'S WATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Opportunity and Why It's Important

Modernizing Oregon's water management system will give Oregon a comparative economic advantage over other western states, helping Oregon grow and sustain its economy, protect and enhance natural systems, and enable all Oregonians to live more prosperous lives.

At the same time, Oregon has an opportunity to greatly mitigate the risks of water shortages, with their adverse impacts on community safety, public health, and economic livelihood. Alleviating water shortages will go a long way, especially in rural areas, to improve local livability and economic activity. This is especially pertinent as climate change pushes parts of Oregon into their third consecutive summer of drought and wildfire danger, which bear most heavily on Oregon's economically stressed communities and families.

Current Status

In 2021 an Oregon Business Council task force on water policy concluded that the water challenges facing Oregon stem largely from our reliance on a water management system designed to serve another era. This system is ill suited to the demands of a growing urban and suburban population, to shrinking rural communities, and to the effects of climate change. The task force report recommended that Oregon:

1. Move to a more regional approach to water management
2. Modernize its water data infrastructure to increase water data use and usefulness
3. Reform Oregon's water permitting process to be more responsive to unsustainable conditions
4. Ensure water affordability and equity for all Oregonians.

In 2021 the Oregon legislature, recognizing this issue, allocated over \$400 million to improve water infrastructure, collect more data on water use, and build capacity to manage water more effectively at the regional level. County commissioners are working with local constituents to better understand the water challenges at the local level, and nearly 50 water stakeholders are working to agree on a set of recommendations that will accelerate the regionalization of water management. The Oregon Business Plan supports timely action on these efforts.

Recommendation

- By December 2023 launch a governor-led, ten-year plan to modernize Oregon's water systems management. Empower water stakeholders to seek creative solutions to water management challenges by moving away from traditional regulatory oversight to performance-based objectives.