



# Oregon's 100-Year Water Vision: A Call to Action

Preparing a Secure, Safe, and Resilient Water Future for All Oregonians

## Vision Statement

To address changes in climate and population dynamics, Oregonians will take care of our water to ensure we have enough clean water for our people, our economy, and our environment, now and for future generations. Oregonians will invest strategically in infrastructure and ecosystems across all regions to support resilient communities, vibrant local economies, and a healthy environment for all who live here.

## Premise

Many areas of Oregon are known for clean and reliable water. As identified in Oregon's [Integrated Water Resources Strategy](#), some of the forces that combine to place significant stress on Oregon's water and water systems include:

- 1) Climate change and associated increases in temperature, wildfire, drought, damaging floods, and harmful algal blooms;
- 2) A half century of underinvestment in built and natural water infrastructure;
- 3) Our changing population and associated development – growing in some areas, shrinking in others; and
- 4) Too much demand for too little water for in-stream and out-of-stream uses.

These factors impact the quality and quantity of water for our communities, including water in our rivers, lakes, oceans, reservoirs, and aquifers. Simply put, if we are not willing to roll up our sleeves and work together to invest in the ecosystems that sustain us along with built and natural water infrastructure, we place the safety of our communities, the health of our people and environment, and Oregon's economic future at risk.



## Goals

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*Each goal below is important. No single goal can be fully realized independent of the others. Recognizing that tension, we need to invest in a range of innovative solutions that work in balance for our shared water future.*

- 💧 **Health: Clean water for all who live in Oregon**  
Water should be fishable, swimmable, and drinkable. Investments in ecosystem health, and built and natural infrastructure will provide reliable access to clean water.
- 💧 **Economy: Sustainable and clean water to support local economic vitality**  
Diverse and resilient agricultural, timber, fishing, hi-tech, energy, and recreation economies require a reliable and clean water supply. Investments in built and natural water infrastructure will support high quality jobs across all Oregon communities.
- 💧 **Environment: Adequate cool, clean water to sustain Oregon's ecosystems for healthy fish and wildlife**  
Cool, clean water and healthy forests, wetlands, riparian areas, streams, and estuaries provide essential natural processes that maintain and enhance water quality for fish and wildlife. Investments in ecosystems also provide recreational opportunities for those who live in and visit Oregon.
- 💧 **Safety: Resilient water supplies and flood protection systems for Oregon's communities**  
Natural and built water systems designed to protect communities, and increase their resiliency to disasters like earthquakes, wildfires, floods, drought, and sea level rise, are important for all Oregon communities. Investments in those systems will help create safer communities and healthier ecosystems.

## Call to Action

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Oregon's limited water supplies are already being shaped by climate and population changes. We must both act now and plan for the long term. How we choose to care for our water will determine if we pass a legacy of clean and sustainable water to future generations.

## Principles

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*Note: The following principles were raised during the 2019 Vision outreach conversations. Some of them mirror [principles](#) in the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS). Where the concepts are similar, the IWRS principles are referenced. Information gathered through the fall will also be used as part of the next update to the IWRS.*

While the Vision goals reflect *the needs we have* for water, our principles guide how *people can work together* to achieve a secure, safe, and resilient water future for all who live here.

**Balancing Interests:** Water is an essential but limited resource. We recognize there is not enough water to meet every 'want.' We will seek to balance interests across all of our water goals, and recognize the best solutions should address multiple uses. (*IWRS Principles - Balance, Sustainability, Interconnection/Integration*)

**State Framework with Regional and Local Flexibility:** Water challenges and opportunities vary greatly from region to region across the state. Successful strategic solutions and investments will build on flexible approaches that respect regional differences. These approaches should be both supported and bounded by a state framework, grounded in current water law, with clear policies to define the direction. (*IWRS Principles - Science-Based, Flexible Approaches, Implementation, Facilitation by the state*)

**Tribal Sovereignty:** Oregon's water future is best implemented when we work in partnership with the sovereign tribes in Oregon, respecting both treaty rights and tribal cultural connections to water.

**Equity & Transparency:** The benefits of clean and reliable water are shared by all who live here, along with our native fish and wildlife. We will build a more equitable water future by ensuring our water decisions and investments are inclusive and transparent, with opportunities for all communities to participate. (*IWRS Principles - Public Process*)

**Affordability:** Improvements to our infrastructure and ecosystems come with costs. We will ensure that those costs are not disproportionately borne by those who can least afford it. (*IWRS Principles - Reasonable Cost*)

**Infrastructure & Ecosystems:** Oregon's water goals can be met in many ways. We recognize that built systems like dams, pipes, levees are only one part of the solution. Natural systems like wetlands, estuaries, and rivers themselves must also be part of Oregon's water future - both as natural infrastructure that provides clean water for human use, and as the components of a healthy ecosystem for fish and wildlife.

**Coordination & Collaboration:** We support formation of regional, coordinated, and collaborative partnerships that include representatives of local, state, federal, and tribal government, private and non-profit sectors, stakeholders, and the public to plan and invest strategically. (*IWRS Principles - Collaboration, Incentives*)

**Engaged Oregonians:** Engaged community members and water leaders are key to helping all of us who live in Oregon understand the value water as part of our culture, our communities, and our ecosystems. We will cultivate leaders in communities across Oregon that understand the importance of conserving and keeping our water clean, and recognize the need for coordinated water investments.

**Innovation:** Working with creative individuals and businesses across the state, we will invest in innovative solutions that balance the advantages of built, and natural infrastructure, while also protecting ecosystem values.

**Best Use of Available Science Combined with Local Knowledge:** The best solutions come when we recognize that both science and local knowledge have value. We will build investment approaches that allow for learning, adaptation, and innovative ideas. (*IWRS Principles - Science-Based, Flexible Approaches*)

**Water as a public resource:** Public investments in our water future should result in public benefits.

## Oregon's Water Challenges

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**Acknowledgements:** Water is not like other kinds of infrastructure or natural resources. It is a public resource, but is managed by both public and private entities. It has cultural significance, and is essential to sustain life. There is a finite amount of water and it moves across the landscape while also varying in availability from year to year. Each of us has our own unique background that influences our perspectives on water and water infrastructure. This history forms the foundation for the different ways we each envision our water future. When we each bring that background to a common table, there can be disagreements. Respecting our different perspectives, the lessons we have learned, and the unique water challenges we've faced in our history will be important to develop a shared water future. Below are a list of common challenges and opportunities that will benefit from the focused attention of Oregonians with diverse perspectives.

### Water System Challenges

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#### Water Availability

**System challenge:** Many of Oregon's water delivery systems are outdated and inefficient, increasing the chance that water will not be available for communities when it is most needed.

**System opportunity:** We can incentivize water conservation and reuse, and invest in modern water delivery systems statewide. Efficiency gains and updated systems will help improve water reliability for cities and counties, tribes, ecosystems, and the many aspects of a thriving economy that depend on water.

#### Clean Water

**System Challenge:** Not all parts of Oregon have reliable access to clean water, resulting in increased health risks for those who live here.

**System Opportunity:** We can invest in resilient built and natural water infrastructure, and reduce pollutants to provide clean water for all Oregon communities.

#### Ecosystems

**System Challenge:** Not all watersheds provide cool, clean water and habitat for fish and wildlife, threatening the sustainability of those species in Oregon.

**System opportunity:** We can increase investments in watersheds to store, filter, and deliver water for fish and wildlife.

#### Community Security

**System challenge:** Too much of Oregon's built infrastructure is neglected and not keeping communities safe, while we have not fully realized the benefits of natural infrastructure and ecosystems to protect communities from harmful floods and provide resilience to drought.

**System opportunity:** We can modernize our flood protection infrastructure where appropriate, while fully incorporating the benefits of natural infrastructure and ecosystems. Combined, these will help mitigate impacts of increased flooding and drought, while reducing the impacts of sea level rise to coastal communities.

## Management Challenges

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### Data & Information Services

**Management Challenge:** Communities across Oregon lack basic data and information to make strategic, long-term decisions about water investments and water management.

**Management Opportunity:** Good data is the foundation of wise and coordinated decisions. We can work across agencies at all levels, with tribes, and with the private sector to improve access to accurate, relevant, trusted, and current water data and infrastructure condition. We can also use science and information to anticipate future trends. Access to quality information will help communities strategically plan for and invest in their water future.

### Community Capacity

**Management Challenge:** Communities with fewer resources are challenged to strategically plan for and invest in their water future and need access to a skilled workforce to implement, manage, and monitor water projects.

**Management Opportunity:** We can begin investing now in strong community capacity and a skilled water workforce in every region across Oregon.

### Investments in Water

**Management Challenge:** We have underinvested in our built and natural water infrastructure, and our ecosystems. Investments in water planning and projects are not fully coordinated at the community, regional or state levels, and there has not been a concerted conversation about how Oregon will fund its future water needs.

**Management Opportunity:** We can coordinate our current investments and seek new sustainable, dedicated public and private funding for restoration of ecosystems, and built and natural infrastructure. Coordinated and new investments will ensure communities – including Oregon’s federally recognized tribes and those people living in disproportionately impacted and rural communities - can afford and access adequate clean water, and return it to our rivers for downstream users, fish, and wildlife.

### Water Investment Decision-Making

**Management challenge:** Oregon lacks a cohesive governance system to strategically prioritize water investments at the local and regional levels, leaving those decisions to a wide array of individuals, governments, and other interests with overlapping priorities and investment needs.

**Management Opportunity:** Learning from other successful models, Oregon can implement best approaches to ensure water planning and investment decisions are strategic and coordinated across jurisdictions, and with public and private partners. This system can successfully combine a state-level framework with local and regional planning and flexibility.

### Education & Culture

**Management Challenge:** Community leaders across Oregon have limited awareness of Oregon’s water challenges, the urgency to act now, and potential water solutions.

**Management Opportunity:** We can work with communities to build a culture and leadership that prioritizes water at the local, regional, and statewide levels.