

# OREGON'S GROUNDWATER



## Allocation Rulemaking

Groundwater levels are declining where the amount of water taken out of the system is more than what is replaced through natural water cycles. **Oregon's precious groundwater resources are being depleted at a rate that is unsustainable .**

Climate change exacerbates these water conditions. Some Oregonians are experiencing water scarcity, water shortages, and wells that have gone dry. Groundwater depletion reduces surface water flows in streams, rivers, and lakes affecting fish, aquatic habitats and recreation.

This issue **impacts all Oregon families, farmers, cities and industries.**



Oregon joins many other western states in recognizing the devastating impacts of groundwater depletion.

- ⇒ In Oregon, **~1,220 water wells have gone dry** across the state since June 2021.
- ⇒ Streamflows have been **reduced**, impacting existing users, streams and **water quality**.
- ⇒ **Communities and economies** have invested in and **depend upon existing water** resources.

**Issue: The rate of groundwater depletion in Oregon is unsustainable.**



Current water right permitting practices do not consider long term impacts to underground aquifers and surface waters when granting water rights.

Addressing the long-term impact of groundwater depletion requires the modification of longstanding practices and rules for reviewing new water right applications.

With a forward-looking approach that considers **the needs of current and future generations**, OWRD is working to **safeguard existing surface water and groundwater users** and the livelihoods they support while managing groundwater resources more sustainably.

## Modernizing the approach to evaluating “is water available?”

The proposed rules focus on determining if groundwater is available to support new uses when issuing new groundwater rights. The proposed rules do these things:

- ⇒ Define key terminology and criteria for decision-making for issuing new water rights
- ⇒ Water is available if groundwater is reasonably stable, does not interfere with surface water flows and the aquifer can produce the water at the requested amount
- ⇒ Application would be denied if existing data over the previous five years did not show water is available



This means fewer water right applications would be granted for new uses in areas of excessive groundwater declines or where new groundwater rights affect existing surface water rights.

*NOTE: The proposed rules will not change exempt groundwater use, existing water rights, groundwater applications that are already in the agency queue, or water rights transfer processes.*

## Water for the Future

Cities in the western U.S. have found ways to grow their populations and economies while using less water. Growth can continue to occur in Oregon, but Oregonians must adapt, invest and innovate to meet the changing realities and address the health and safety, population growth, economic development, and housing needs of the state.

Some examples include:

- Efficiency and conservation measures to offset water needs
- Transfer of water rights
- Water sharing agreements
- Market-based solutions
- Designing for water reuse and reclamation

On a larger scale, planning initiatives can help communities explore multifaceted solutions to their long-term water needs.



Similar options to meet water needs may exist for other water users, such as agriculture and industry.