

Modernizing Mid-Columbia River Water Management

*Optimizing infrastructure, memorializing community commitments.
Securing water for the future.*

Why This Matters

Over time, water systems and water management needs have evolved. Legal frameworks have not kept pace. This proposal updates Oregon's water management laws, adding flexibility where warranted and prioritizing state resources accordingly, all in a manner that reflects how modern water systems can and should operate more efficiently, with more agility, and more responsiveness, while at the same time ensuring environmental and regulatory protections at the points of diversion.

A Coordinated Approach

To support long-term water reliability, communities and local governments formed the Northeast Oregon Water Association (NOWA) in 2012 to coordinate planning and collaboration across jurisdictions. They later established the Mid-Columbia Water Commission (Mid-C) as a public, intergovernmental entity to manage shared Columbia River infrastructure, operations, water-right administration, and compliance reporting.

Together, this structure ensures water is managed efficiently, transparently, and responsibly, benefiting communities, agriculture, and the environment.

This proposal modernizes the legal framework for symbiotically managing Columbia River water to better reflect the need for more efficient water use and to focus state resources where needed most.



What Is Being Proposed

*The end use of water does not change;
management between diversion and use does.*

This legislation provides a targeted update to improve how existing Columbia River irrigation water rights and associated mitigation are managed and tracked in the Mid-Columbia region. The proposal:



Enables an approach to account for water use in shared-system infrastructure



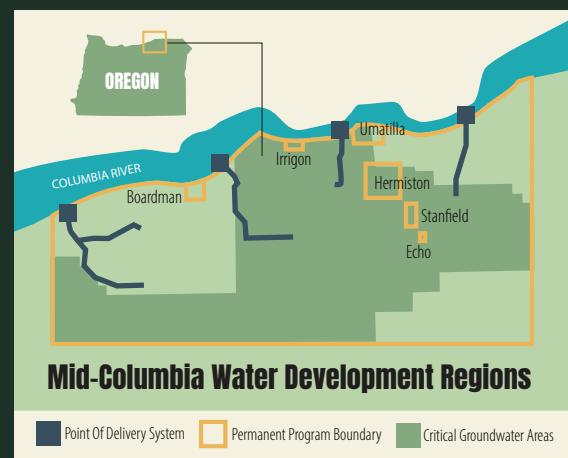
Focuses state resources on diversions, while recognizing local government expertise for water delivery management



Allows participation in an established district water-rights mapping process, so water use is reflected correctly on a system-wide basis



Supports groundwater recovery and long-term water reliability



Built on Proven Planning and Investment

This proposal is the result of decades of coordinated planning, collaboration, and investment.

2008

The Umatilla Sub-Basin 2050 Water Management Plan identified the need to reduce groundwater pumping by responsibly using Columbia River water.

2012

Regional efforts led to the creation of the **Columbia River-Umatilla Solutions Task Force (CRUST)** and was convened by then-Governor John Kitzhaber, establishing a cooperative framework and legislative funding package to develop regional water-supply projects while protecting fisheries.

Local governments and stakeholders formed **NOWA** to coordinate long-term water-reliability solutions.

This legislation closes a remaining policy gap by ensuring water systems serving communities and agriculture are utilized to their maximum potential.

2015-current

Invested over \$300 million in shared Columbia River infrastructure.

Secured mitigated water-right permits from Oregon Water Resources Department, and annual instream rights as qualifying mitigation.

Integrated dozens of individual water rights into coordinated diversion and delivery systems.

Established Mid-C under ORS190 to manage operations and compliance reporting.

Why This Matters Statewide

Oregon's water laws must evolve to meet growing consumptive and non-consumptive demands on water systems and infrastructure.

This proposal honors 2050 Plan commitments, integrates infrastructure for multiple uses, strengthens water-supply accountability, and removes key barriers to a final Mid-Columbia solution.



Does

Allow senior water users to voluntarily commit their water supplies for the benefit of the district

Strengthen transparency and accountability

Reduce unnecessary administrative complexity

Ensure accurate measurement and reporting

Support aquifer protection and drought resilience



Does Not

Create new water rights

Increase diversions or expand seasons of use

Eliminate state oversight or enforcement

Weaken protections for the Columbia River

Infringe upon ongoing Umatilla River tribal settlement negotiations

Did You Know?

French fries served nationwide often start in Morrow County, where irrigated potatoes supply major food processors and restaurant chains.

Umatilla County wheat is exported around the world, becoming noodles, crackers, and pastries in Japan and other Asian markets.

Hay and other feed crops grown here support domestic dairy operations and feed cattle in Asia and the Middle East.

Food from Umatilla and Morrow counties moves through the Port of Morrow, connecting local farms to global markets.

The Ordnance Project alone - one of three regional projects built since 2015 - will support more than 2,450 permanent jobs, generate over \$3 billion in additional business activity, and deliver lasting property and income tax benefits for Oregon while also recovering depleted groundwater aquifers.

Learn more at northeastoregonwater.org

