

# 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 water 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.



**NORTHEAST  
OREGON**  
WATER ASSOCIATION

## 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



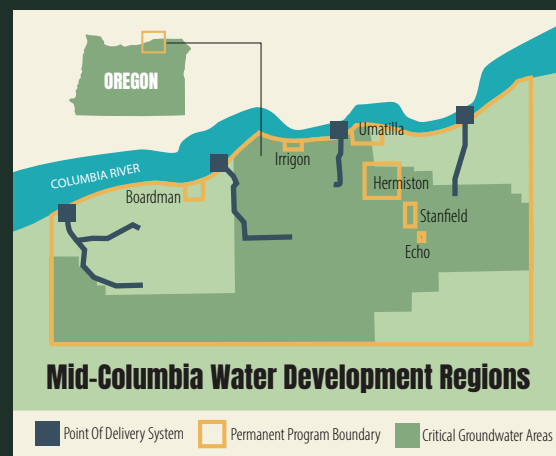
**Focuses state resources**  
on diversions, while recognizing local government expertise for water delivery management



**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.*

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

## 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.

## 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 Ordinance 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](http://northeastoregonwater.org)**

