Oregon’s economy and way of life depend on a clean and reliable source of water for our farms, fish, and faucets.

However, the future of Oregon’s water resources is uncertain. Across the state, wells and streams are going dry because officials have promised more water than nature can provide.

Water scarcity affects everyone, including growing communities, fishermen, farmers, manufacturers, and all Oregonians who love our rivers, salmon and steelhead runs, and natural landscapes.

THE PROBLEM

There are critical gaps in our knowledge of how much water we have or how quickly it is being consumed. Without this basic information, it’s impossible to reliably and responsibly plan for the seasons ahead. This hurts all Oregonians, creating economic uncertainty and risks to public health, local food production, and fish populations when rivers run too low.

According to a 2016 audit, the department charged with managing this critical public resource is chronically underfunded and consequently unable to balance the needs of water users and our rivers based on sound data.

THE SOLUTION

Our vital water resources are not limitless - they require careful safeguarding. Our state must prioritize smart management of Oregon’s public waters and 88,000 existing water rights to protect current and future water needs.

2017 SMART WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN:

MEASURE OUR WATER USE

HB 2705 would require water users to measure and report how much water they withdraw from rivers and from the ground. Currently only 20% of water right holders are required to report their water usage.

ENSURE STABLE FUNDING FOR CRITICAL MANAGEMENT SERVICES

HB 2706 would create a new shared annual fee of $100 per water right to pay for the valuable services that the state provides to manage and protect existing water rights and streamflows. Without a stable funding source, the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) can’t fulfill its responsibilities to ensure the long-term sustainability of Oregon’s ecosystems, economy, and quality of life.

IDENTIFY WHERE AND HOW MUCH GROUNDWATER IS AVAILABLE

HB 2707 will provide funding to the OWRD to collect groundwater data now to better understand water availability for drinking water, farming, replenishing stream flows, and other uses.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do these bills apply to domestic wells?
Domestic wells that are exempt from getting a permit will not be required to measure and report their water use or pay an annual fee under these new requirements.

Who is currently required to measure water use?
All governmental entities, including municipalities and irrigation districts, and nearly all new water right holders since 1993 are required to measure water usage. However, most older water rights do not have this requirement and many allow the use of large volumes of water. According to a 2016 audit, less than 20% of water right holders in Oregon measure and report usage. As a result, OWRD does not have a clear understanding of how much water is actually being used.

How much will it cost users to measure and report water use?
For most users that will be affected by the new requirement, installing measurement and recording devices will cost approximately $250-$5,000 per diversion point (costs vary by size).

What is the maximum fee a water right holder with multiple rights could be charged?
The annual water right management fee is capped at $1,000 for any non-municipal water right holder and $2,500 for municipalities.

What state services are covered by current fees?
Water right holders pay an application fee that covers approximately 50% of the cost to the state to process each water right permit. The state does not charge anything for the use of this public resource, nor for the complicated administration and ongoing management of Oregon’s existing 88,000 water rights once they are issued.

How much revenue will the fee yield and what will it be used for?
The water right management fee will generate approximately $8 million per biennium for staff and programs to better manage and allocate the state’s waters, work with landowners to use water efficiently, fund groundwater studies, and fill data gaps to ensure fair and responsible decision making.

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BILLS SUPPORTED BY:

Oregon League of Conservation Voters: Special Focus, Oregon Environmental Council, Trout Unlimited, WaterWatch of Oregon, Wild Salmon Center

In 2008, Oregonians and visitors spent $2.5 billion on fishing, hunting, shellfishing and wildlife viewing activities and equipment - all of which depend on reliable water flows.

Oregon farm, ranch, and commercial fishing production is valued at $5.7 billion per year (OSU 2015). This economic engine depends heavily on secure water supplies and healthy rivers.

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Updated 2.3.17