Optimism and Opportunity

2020-2021 Impact Report

Oregon Environmental Council
Dear Friend of Oregon’s Environment,

As we write to you today, it feels, finally, like we may be entering a season of opportunity. In the last year, we’ve seen the election of new leadership for our country, historic investment in our communities to help them recover from a global pandemic, and an increased focus on accountability for the public officials whose job it is to keep everyone safe. The last year has also proven that systemic social and economic change is possible on an accelerated timeline and that the values of equity, health, and justice can be embedded into the most important decisions.

We must harness this momentum to build back better and address the immense environmental challenges in front of us. From raging wildfires and extreme heat to severe drought and pollution in the limited water that remains, the environmental concerns of our time are as critical as ever and are creating very distinct problems for people across Oregon. At Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) we look at these challenges with clear eyes, and we remain optimistic because we know that our work improves people’s lives and makes Oregon a better place for all of us.

One of the most important lessons of the last year is the interconnectedness of our society. At OEC, we know that a drought, fire, or toxic exposure in one corner of Oregon can quickly ripple across many communities or the entire state. That interconnectedness is also a strength. At OEC we bring forward solutions that draw from the diversity of communities and geographies in Oregon to make changes that protect our future and enhance the lives of people in Oregon today. For example, our work this year reduced Oregon’s future reliance on fossil fuels, helping to stave off the worst effects of climate change in years to come, and it protected farmworkers today, with practical solutions for the extreme heat that is already a reality.

Most importantly, our optimism is fueled by people like you. We are strengthened by the knowledge that you see the opportunity as well, and that you believe in and support this critical work to create a healthier, climate-resilient, and more equitable future. The work we’ve done in the last year is your work too. We truly couldn’t have done it without your support.

Thank you!

Diana Nuñez
Executive Director

Philip Wu, MD
Board President
OEC is a state and national leader, powered by our members. Our most visible work often takes place in the state legislature, but our impact comes in four different areas of work, and it starts and ends with people.

CENTERING EQUITY

In every step of our policy cycle, we approach our work through the lens of equity. We strive to ensure there is a wide range of perspectives and experiences included in the policy process, and that individuals and communities most impacted by an environmental issue have a seat at the table and their voices are heard.

**OUTREACH & COALITION BUILDING**

OEC listens to people from across the state to learn what’s important to them. By listening, we discover emerging environmental concerns and build durable coalitions on shared values to advance proactive solutions. We also learn what’s working and build on those successes across the state.

**IMPLEMENT & DEFEND**

In addition to passing new laws, OEC makes sure that those laws are implemented effectively, and that good laws from the past stay on the books. We monitor and evaluate implementation, publish outcomes and data, and work with regulators and the community to learn when new policies are needed.

**ANALYSIS & POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

OEC creates effective solutions through policies that are based in science and serve the needs of people. We analyze the most recent science and data so we know exactly what the problem is and then build policies that are proven to succeed.

**ADVOCACY**

OEC works with our partners and state leadership, and champions laws and regulations that will protect the environment and support people. We work year-round with partners to shape decisions in city, county, regional, and state governments.
This year, we marked the one-year anniversary of the Oregon Climate Action Plan (OCAP*), the historic executive order signed in March 2020. OEC rallied a huge coalition, was a thought leader on policy design, and with our partners, kept the pressure on the Governor and state agencies to deliver on OCAP’s promises.

We were a leader in creating and releasing the first OCAP progress report, assessing the state’s progress toward climate goals, identifying where it was falling short, and providing a measuring stick for commitments in years to come.

Looking Forward

The first ever worker protections for extreme heat and wildfires are on their way to completion. OEC is working with frontline workers, like farm and construction workers, to find solutions and protect those most impacted by climate disruption. At risk worker voices must be front and center, ensuring that no one is asked to choose between their health and their paycheck.

OEC will continue to help implement the Oregon Climate Action Plan and defend it from attack.

Climate Milestones

- **Working with leadership from** environmental justice partners, and in coalition with utility, renewables, and labor leaders, we **passed a bill to move Oregon to 100% clean electricity by 2040**, among the most ambitious goals in the nation.

- **As a result of OEC’s advocacy,** Governor Brown signed a bill to strengthen efficiency standards for 11 types of residential and commercial appliances. **This will save consumers at least $100M/year on energy bills and cut upwards of 130,000 metric tons of climate pollution annually by 2035.**

- **We inspired our members to act** to support the successful Oregon Energy Affordability Act, which **established rate protections for low-income Oregonians.**

- **Through our work on the rules** advisory committee for the Clean Fuels Program, we successfully changed the program to accelerate transportation electrification. **Clean fuels have replaced 12 billion gallons of oil in Oregon since 2016.**

50+ OCAP COALITION PARTNERS

OCAP encompasses six main areas of work. Each section is co-led by an environmental organization and a community-based frontline organization:
Did you know...

Electric vehicles (EVs) emit no tailpipe pollution, reduce carbon emissions by 70% in Oregon, and cost less to own and operate over their lifecycle.

Designed for the Future

OEC is active where the big transportation decisions are made. Whether it comes to democratizing the Oregon Transportation Commission process to include more real-time public input, sitting on freight and transit advisory committees, or doing weekly teach-ins with legislators, we’re bringing the best ideas to the table.

Milestones

OEC has been actively engaged in building the big coalitions that will be required to deliver broad systems change in our state’s transportation network.

- **Co-founded the Clean and Just Transportation Network** with Verde, Forth, and Climate Solutions to create a state-wide coalition advocating for equitable, sustainable, efficient transportation.
- **Consistently advocated for solutions** that work, like congestion pricing, to truly relieve daily traffic backups.
- **Helped pass a bill to reshape the EV rebate**, including more dollars for low- and moderate-income individuals to purchase new or used vehicles and more resources for dedicated outreach.
- **Lobbied for the passage of state legislation** (HB 2165 and HB 2180) to make EVs more accessible for low-income drivers, allow more flexibility for utilities to support EVs, and make EV-readiness the norm for new buildings.
- **Secured a grant as part of the Rural Electrification Project** for an EV demonstration project in rural irrigation districts.

At the Table

- **Participated in the City of Portland Pricing Options for Equitable Mobility Community Task Force.**
- **Active member of the City of Portland 2040 Freight Community Advisory Committee.**
- **With Bike Loud and No More Freeways,** OEC organized real-time community testimony, resulting in a more open decision-making process and a statewide allocation of state funds to support biking, walking, and transit infrastructure.

10,000+

EV Rebates issued: Totaling over $26M worth of incentives since 2018

5 million

tons of climate pollution slashed, thanks to the Clean Fuels Program
Environmental Health Protections

Dangerous chemicals can be found in our air and in nearly all of Oregon’s rivers. This puts every living organism, including humans, at risk. OEC believes the best way to protect our health is prevention. OEC actively protects both humans and the environment, starting with the most vulnerable populations, by preventing the use of toxic chemicals in the products we use every day.

Improving Health for our Community

Ensured strong rules were included in the final phase of the Toxic Free Kids Act implementation, which governs the phaseout of harmful chemicals in children’s products by 2022. The Oregon Health Authority will provide transparency by posting information about chemicals and industry waiver requests on their website to empower the public with knowledge and added a new requirement that manufacturers periodically test their products to demonstrate consistent control of toxics in kids’ products.

Worked with Hacienda CDC, an affordable housing provider for the Latinx community, to distribute 100 eco-healthy home cleaning kits and collaborated on a community survey to assess toxic exposures of greatest concern among residents.

Made big strides in bringing awareness to environmental health issues, including appearing on TV to draw attention to harmful indoor air quality from natural gas stoves (as wildfires raged outside, temporarily creating the worst air quality in the world), educating a new class of legislators about dangerous chemicals in children’s products, and deepening our standing partnerships to deliver new programs and powerful advocacy.

Won a new budget allocation to address woodsmoke in Multnomah County
This new funding will support a program to educate the public about woodsmoke (a major source of air pollution) and cleaner alternatives to woodstoves.

OEC’s environmental health program director, Jamie Pang South (left), with Hacienda CDC partners.
Water is Life

Water is essential for daily human health and critical for industries like farming. But access to clean and plentiful water depends on where you live and your ability to pay for it. At OEC, we work with water utilities, government agencies, community organizations, and scientists to incorporate the wisdom of the natural world into strong water policy.

With strong partnerships, we can restore wetlands that cool and purify water and break down barriers so that low-income, rural, and communities of color have access to healthy water and decisions about water management.

Water cannot wait! Today, all of Oregon’s major waterways are impacted by pollution.

Elevating New Thinking to Protect Our Water Resources

In 2020, OEC and Willamette Partnership published a first-ever Natural Infrastructure Report. We are working across sectors to increase the uptake, implementation, and funding support for natural infrastructure. Restoring and managing forests and wetlands protects drinking water sources while sequestering carbon, reestablishes floodplains and improves water storage, improves habitat, and can even cool industrial wastewater.

We collaborated with BIPOC communities affected the most by the changing reality of water in Oregon to document the challenges, identify best practices, break down communication barriers, and provide cost-effective solutions that meet the needs of Oregon’s diverse rural communities and protect the environment that sustains us all.

Supporting On-the-Ground Efforts to Improve Water Outcomes

Partnered with Swalley Irrigation District in Tumalo to complete an irrigation canal piping project that returns over 1.2 million gallons of water per day to the river, resulting in increased reliability for farmers while improving the Deschutes River ecosystem.

Supported legislation to mandate a “don’t flush” warning on packaging for disposable wet wipes. Significantly reduced costs to wastewater utilities and protected workers from dangerous clean-up operations.

Supported legislation to fund a low-income septic repair loan fund that increased access to low- or no-interest loans for septic repairs for low-income households and reduced groundwater pollutant threats to public health.

“When one enters water infrastructure, law, and policy spaces, the language that is used is often inaccessible... And when we talk to people and bring that kind of language, people say, ‘well, I don’t know anything about water.’ But if we just ask people, ‘how did you grow up with water, how do you feel about water,’ people have a lot to say and a lot to share.”

— Dr. Alai Reyes Santos, Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of Oregon and co-author of the Oregon Water Futures Report
Statewide Impact

**Clean and Just Transportation Network**
OEC is one of the four founding organizations of the Clean and Just Transportation Network (CJTN), along with Forth, Verde, and Climate Solutions. The CJTN creates opportunities for organizations all around the state to share information, learn together, and incubate new advocacy efforts.

**Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)**
Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN) is co-leading state conversations about climate and health with OEC through the Oregon Climate Action Plan health policy table, with special attention to protections from excessive heat and wildfire smoke. PCUN brings labor organizing power, grassroots connections to agricultural communities, and on-the-ground knowledge of how policy shapes farmworkers’ lives.

**Douglas County Global Warming Coalition**
OEC provides fiscal and administrative support to help catalyze local action in support of climate solutions. The Douglas County Global Warming Coalition (DCGWC) volunteers bring rural voices in support of renewables, efficiency, clean transportation, and climate-friendly approaches to forestry. They also ensure the clean energy economy benefits low-income households. DCGWC members advocate at the state and local levels, publish letters to the editor and opinion pieces in local papers, and actively expand access to climate-smart information through educational tours and a fun and informative quarterly newsletter.
Partnerships

OEC is a member of 19 coalitions with partners around the state.

Our staff serve on 27 advisory committees and commissions working to set policy on the coast, in the valleys, in the mountains, and in the high desert.

Our 2,157 members come from 29 of Oregon’s 36 counties.

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians
OEC worked with the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) leadership to foster dialogue about access to water and the inclusion of tribal voices in water policy decisions. ATNI also co-leads the Climate Protection Program policy table with OEC and continues to participate in Renew Oregon leadership to advocate for legislative action to address the climate crisis.

Swalley Irrigation District
Working with Swalley Irrigation District to pipe water in irrigation ditches, and reduce the water lost to evaporation, OEC helps return over 1.2 million gallons of water each day to the Deschutes River. Partnerships like this build the trust and strengthen relationships we need to deepen our impact. For example, we’re working with the irrigation district in 2021 to pilot the use of electric vehicles for agricultural and irrigation purposes in rural Oregon.

"Good policy evolves from collaboration between legislators and the experts. I can always depend on OEC to bring the best science, canny political strategy, and the support of partners from across the state to all of our work together."

— Representative Pam Marsh, Oregon State Legislature, District 5
Your Dollars at Work
FY 2020-2021
April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021

Revenue Sources

- Grants
- Individual Donations
- Federal COVID Recovery Funding*
- Bequests
- Corporate
- Other

*OEC received approximately $314K in 2020 Federal COVID Recovery Funding. This funding, along with the continued support of committed donors, ensured that OEC emerged from 2020 healthy and able to continue our critical work.

Allocation of Revenue

- Fundraising
- Programs
- Administrative & Management

Renew: In 2015, OEC helped create Renew Oregon, the most powerful coalition ever assembled in our state to advocate for climate protection. We continue to serve as a fiscal sponsor.
Over the last year, Oregon Environmental Council has worked tirelessly to protect Oregon and its people. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, this work is only possible thanks to the support of our members.

In fiscal year 2021, approximately 40% of OEC’s funding came from annual gifts or bequests from individuals who took action to protect our home and neighbors. We couldn’t do this work without our members, and we are truly honored to represent the people of Oregon. Thank you to all who believe in and support this critical work.

As a citizen that has directly benefited from your ongoing work to keep this beautiful land clean, safe, celebrated, and sacred, I want to say thank you. Thank you for continuing to show up to deliberations where communities of color, working class families, ecological health, and our future generations are belittled. Thank you for reaching across the aisle and humanizing the often-polarized issues currently dividing us. It is an immense privilege to know people like you are doing the hardest work where it is needed most. On behalf of those who look forward to a healthier and happier Oregon, I thank you.

— Bristol Ozturgut, OEC member

I am proud to support OEC, as the staff is incredibly effective at achieving their goals. They advocate for science-based policies that will help solve Oregon’s environmental problems while supporting our economy. I am especially excited about the work they are doing to reduce climate pollution.

— Denise Coogan, OEC Member

Oregon Environmental Council is deeply committed to protecting the environment and advancing environmental issues on the local and national level. I am happy to support OEC in its critical efforts to protect Oregon’s water, air, and land.

— Karen Pickering, OEC member
For more than 50 years, Oregon Environmental Council has advanced solutions to Oregon’s most pressing environmental challenges, forwarding impactful and lasting strategies to improve the health and well-being of every Oregonian and this place we call home.