

Item D – Project Implementation Update



Groundwater Section 2021-23 Biennium Projects and Priorities

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Item D, Attachment 5

Groundwater Hydrology Section 2021-23 Biennium Work Priorities and Projects

The Groundwater Hydrology Section (GWH) within the Technical Services Division of the [Oregon Water Resources Department](#) (WRD) supports the agency's mission through implementation of the Groundwater Act of 1955 (ORS 537.505 to 537.795 and 537.992) and related administrative rules. We conduct our work in alignment with WRD's [Integrated Water Resources Strategy](#) (IWRS). Groundwater section staff participate in all facets of the agency's core work as described in its [2019-24 Strategic Plan](#). We are the primary entity responsible for collecting groundwater data statewide, organizing and interpreting that data, and applying that data and information to support analysis of groundwater right transactions, distribution and regulation of groundwater, and planning efforts to meet future groundwater needs.

The Groundwater Section grew from 14 positions (10 filled) to 21 positions after the 2021 Legislative Session, and several new groundwater-related projects were authorized and funded. This document highlights our section priorities and projects for the 2021-23 biennium, which are cross-referenced to the applicable [IWRS recommended actions](#) and related [Key Performance Measures](#) (KPMs) for each topic area.

Core Functions - Day-to-day work and standard section business that spans the biennium

- **Data and Information** – *IWRS 1.A, 1.B, 1.C, 2.B, 3.B, 8.D; KPM 5, 7, 8*
 - Collect water level and/or use data from over [1200 observation wells across Oregon](#) and make that data available to the public through [GWIS](#) and other data platforms
 - Assess hydrogeologic data to continuously improve our shared understanding of the state's groundwater systems, including basin study projects (see below)
- **Water Right Transactions** – *IWRS 1.C, 11.E; KPM 10, 11*
 - Conduct [technical reviews](#) of groundwater right transaction applications, including new appropriations, transfers, extensions of time, and others; respond to applicant feedback
 - Manage groundwater-related programs, including the Aquifer Storage and Recovery ([ASR](#)), Artificial Recharge ([AR](#)), Pump Test ([PT](#)), and Low-Temp Geothermal ([LTG](#)) programs
 - Prepare and provide expert witness testimony for contested case and PJR hearings
- **Distribution and Regulation of Groundwater** – *IWRS 1.C, 11.E; KPM 3*
 - Investigate [groundwater interference complaints](#), assess groundwater permit decline conditions, and support regulation by watermasters
 - Manage the state's [groundwater administrative areas](#), including Critical Groundwater Area allocations, Groundwater Limited Area permit renewals, and SWMPA reporting
 - Respond to well inspector requests for consultation to implement [HB 2145](#)
- **Meeting Future Needs** – *IWRS 1.C, 8.C; KPM 7*
 - Support the four groups piloting Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Planning, plus similar groups forming in the Deschutes and Walla Walla basins, by responding to technical assistance requests, presenting at public meetings, and addressing other stakeholder requests
 - Provide input on grant applications involving groundwater resources
- **Administrative**
 - Administer the Groundwater Advisory Committee ([GWAC](#))

2021-2023 Groundwater Hydrology Projects

The following are GWH projects for the 2021-23 biennium, many of which require coordination with others in the Department and external partners. This work is in addition to the "Core Functions" described above.

	Project	Tentative Timeframe
Administrative KPM 10, 11	Recruit Assistant GHS Manager x1 (currently open)	Jul 2021 – Dec 2022
	Recruit NRS-4 Hydrogeologist x2 (1 filled, 1 currently open)	Jul 2021 – Dec 2022
	Recruit NRS-3 Hydrogeologist x6 (5 filled, 1 currently open)	Jul 2021 – Dec 2022
	Recruit NRS-3 GW Data Developer x1 (filled)	April 2022
	Recruit NRS-2 GW Data Specialist x2 (filled)	April 2022
	Contested case backlog reduction, expert witness prep and testimony	Spans full biennium
	Contracts for studies and observation well installation (Recurring GF)	Spans full biennium
	Groundwater right technical review business process streamlining	Spans full biennium
	Groundwater section desk reference	Pre-2021 to post-2023
	Harney Basin Groundwater Study	Spans full biennium
Groundwater Data and Information IWRS 1.A, 1.B, 1.C, 2.B, 3.B, 8.D; KPM 5, 7	Walla Walla Basin Groundwater Study	Spans full biennium
	HB 2018 Statewide Groundwater Budgets Study	Spans full biennium
	HB 2018 Observation Well Network Expansion	Spans full biennium
	American Rescue Plan Act appropriations (HB 5006) – install additional observation wells	Before Dec 2023
	Support drought-related work; dry-well response and emergency use authorization	2020 to present
	Groundwater database upgrades and information products	Spans full biennium
	Oregon Open Data Program participation	Spans full biennium
	Oregon Water Data Portal participation (HB 5006)	Spans full biennium
	National Groundwater Level Monitoring Network - Portland Basin well net and observation well drilling	Spans full biennium
	Creation of databases and support software for groundwater chemistry and equipment	Spans full biennium
Rulemaking IWRS 11.E	Harney Basin Program (Dijv 512)	Start 2023
	Critical Groundwater Area Designation and Curtailment (Dijv 10)	Expected start Fall 2022
	Groundwater Allocation Policy (Dijv 8, 9, 310, 400, 410)	In progress
	Klamath Basin CGWA (Dijv 25 replacement)	On Hold
Sovereign Engagement	CTUIR ; water rights settlement, groundwater component	On Hold
	California DWR ; Klamath Basin groundwater coordination	Anticipated
	Washington Ecology ; Walla Walla Water 2050 process	Spans full biennium

Slowed or Stalled Work - Efforts put on hold or slowed due to lack of capacity and other priorities

- **Groundwater Basin Studies** – Going slow on all projects due to staffing limitations (OWRD and USGS)
- **CGWA Rules ([Dijv 10](#))** - On hold, rules coordinator vacant, other competing rulemaking priorities
- **Allocation Rules** – Timeline extended, seeking public input before drafting rules, coordinator vacant
- **HB2018** – Going slow on all components due to staffing limitations (OWRD and USGS)

Guided by Existing Plans

- Core Functions defined in 2019 Strategic Plan
- All work aligned with 2017 IWRS recommended actions and Legislative KPMs

Integrated Water Resources Strategy | Oregon's **2017**



Oregon Water
Resources
Department
Strategic Plan
2019-2024

Core Functions

- Data and Information
- Water Right Transactions
- Distribution and Regulation of GW
- Meeting Future Needs



Projects: Administrative

- Recruitment - 8 new staff hired, 3 in process
- Water right technical review training and streamlining
- GW Section reference manual
- Contested Case backlog reduction



Basin Studies

- Harney – published water budget and conceptual model, working on numerical model
- Walla Walla – data collection phase, coordinating across the WA/OR border

Statewide Recharge Study*

- Contracted last month
- Coordinating staff resources from across the USGS
- Planning expanded data collection with SWH and FSD

*Component of HB 2018

Observation Well Network Expansion*

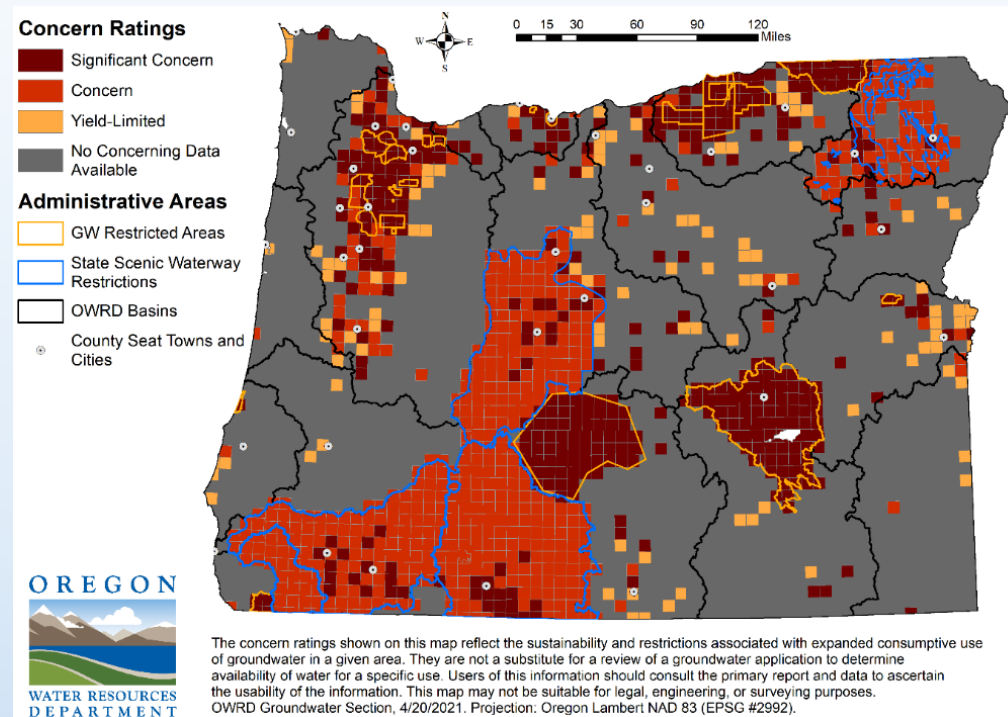
- 18 sites identified state-wide
- Leveraging federal funds to augment state resources
- Contracting has been difficult; state platform transition, over-extended capacity

*Component of HB 2018



Various Data Accessibility Programs

- Oregon Open Data Program
- Oregon Water Data Portal (HB 5006)
- National Groundwater Monitoring Network
- Dry Well database
- Groundwater Information System



Projects: Rulemaking

Affecting existing water rights:

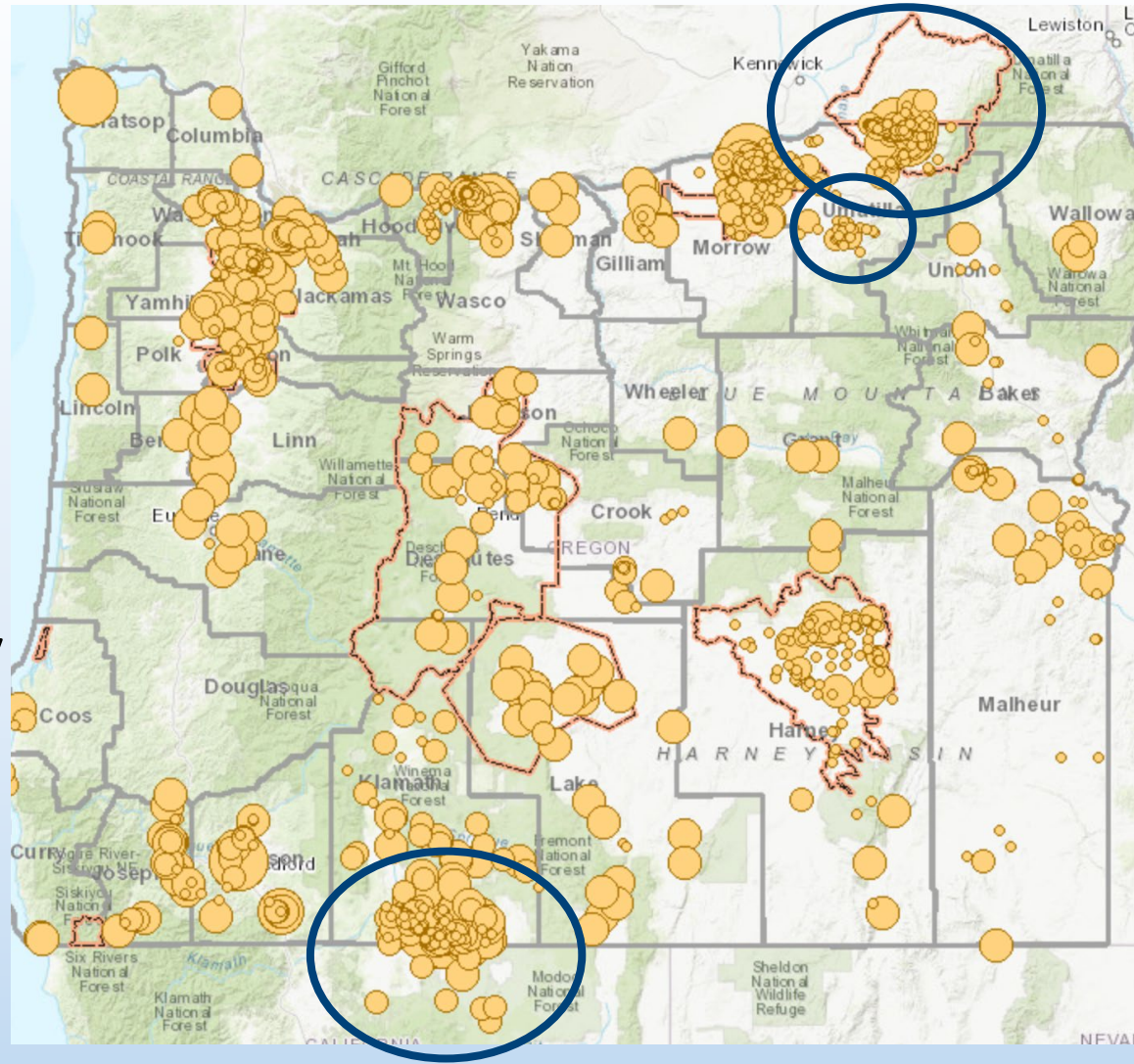
- CGWA process rules - Division 10
- Harney Basin CGWA designation – Division 512

Affecting future water right applications:

- Groundwater Allocation Project – potentially including Divisions 8, 9, 310, 400, 410, and others.

Projects: Sovereign Engagement

- CTUIR Water Rights Settlement
- California DWR Klamath Basin Coordination
- Washington Ecology Walla Walla Basin Coordination





Thank you.

