

MEMORANDUM

TO: Water Resources Commission

FROM: Paul R. Cleary, Director

SUBJECT: Agenda Item II, February 13, 2003
Water Resources Commission Work Session

Long-Term Water Supply Management

I. Issue Statement

In February 2003, the Water Resources Department will be observing the 94th birthday of Oregon's water code. In anticipation of the code's 100th birthday in 2009, the Department is kicking-off an initiative entitled "**Oregon's Second Century of Water Management: Where Do We Want To Be in 2009?**" For this work session, staff have assembled four "solution-oriented" panels to begin a dialog about statewide long-term water supply management needs, issues and concerns. *No Commission action is requested; this is an informational report only.*

II. Background

Since 1990 Oregon has averaged more than 50,000 new residents per year, and a 34% increase in population is projected over the next 25 years. Today there are approximately 84,000 water rights to use surface water or ground water, and to store water; representing a 30% increase in the last decade. In addition there are thousands of small ground water uses exempt from water right requirements. All of these increases in population, water demand, and agency workload have occurred against a backdrop of declining Department staffing and significant budgetary constraints.

In most basins of the state, surface water has been fully allocated to the extent that no additional water is available for new appropriations during spring, summer and fall months. The state's ground water resources are not inexhaustible and are increasingly found to be in direct hydraulic connection with surface water bodies. To complicate matters, most rivers in the state are within areas containing listed fish species under the federal Endangered Species Act and there are a number of water quality-limited streams throughout the state. To the extent that low streamflow levels impact listed species or water quality, the continued use of water for existing and new out-of-stream uses is less certain than in the past and the need for water instream is more important than ever.

III. Discussion

Despite past efforts dating back to the mid-1950s, the state does not have a comprehensive plan to ensure it can meet the water needs of streamflow-dependant resources and a growing economy and population. Historically, the Department's primary role in terms of planning for future water supply and demand has been to protect existing water right holders and to provide information – about available storage sites, about conservation methods and opportunities, and about water availability. Currently the Department is involved in a number of water management activities including: supply and demand forecasting; surface and ground water availability studies; provision of web-based water resource information; water storage site inventory; agency coordination; land use/water use coordination; Oregon Plan efforts; Willamette Basin Reservoir Study; Senate Bill 93 Task Force on Water Supply and Conservation; and municipal and agricultural water management and conservation plan development. However, the Department's activities and the activities of numerous other state, local, and federal entities are not coordinated under a statewide long-term plan.

It should be noted that notwithstanding the lack of a comprehensive statewide water supply plan, water supply projects are being proposed and constructed and streamflows are being restored. For example, in 2002 there was almost 400 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water protected instream through leases, transfers, and allocations of conserved water. Over the last few years, Coos Bay-North Bend Water Board enlarged Upper Pony Creek Reservoir by 1,680 acre-feet; the Joint Water Commission, consisting of the cities of Hillsboro, Forest Grove and Beaverton, expanded the storage capacity of Barney Reservoir by 4,000 acre-feet; and the City of McMinnville expanded McGuire Reservoir by 3,760 acre-feet. Moreover, since January 1999, the Department has issued 63 permits for reservoirs that store 50 acre-feet of water or more. Finally, five municipal water providers are actively engaged in testing Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) under limited licenses issued by the Department.

A coordinated long-term water supply effort would benefit Oregon in its challenge to meet future needs by focusing its resources, spending, and desired outcomes. However, a number of difficult policy questions must be addressed before moving ahead with such an effort such as: What is the Department's role in planning for and implementing long-term water supply management? What local planning and management activities are currently taking place and how would they be integrated? What is the role of other state and federal natural resource agencies? What agencies/entities are best suited for assessing the full range of future water demands? What is the role for local governments, watershed councils, and soil and water conservation districts? Is the appropriate governmental structure in place to allow such a coordinated effort? How will such a planning and implementation effort be funded?

The looming 100th birthday of Oregon's water code gives the Commission, the Department, and stakeholders an opportunity to reflect on the last century of water management and to begin a dialog of where do we go from here. As the dialog progresses, the Department will continue its efforts to improve its customer services, to enhance water conservation and streamflow restoration incentives, to look for opportunities to streamline its permitting processes, and to develop a diversified package of water supply tools.

Given the varied challenges facing the state, long-term water supply management needs greater attention. The problem has been identified – no entity is overseeing a coordinated statewide effort to plan for Oregon's long-term future water supply. Staff welcome the opportunity to engage in a dialog with the Commission and stakeholders about how to (or whether to) move forward with a long-term water supply management vision for Oregon.

IV. Recommendation

No action is required; this is an informational report only.