



# Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, MD, Governor

## Water Resources Department

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### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Water Resources Commission

**FROM:** Alyssa Mucken, IWRS Program Coordinator

**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item S, November 15, 2013  
Water Resources Commission

#### **Update: “Water for Irrigation, Streams, and Economy” (WISE) Project**

### **I. Introduction**

“Water for Irrigation, Streams, and Economy,” or WISE, is a project to improve water management in the Rogue Valley. Project partners are working to identify opportunities to increase irrigation reliability and availability, improve water quality and instream habitat, support renewed investment in agriculture, and improve recreational opportunities in the region.

Kate Jackson from the Governor’s Regional Solutions Team and Steve Mason, WISE Project Coordinator, will provide an update on the project, including progress made since the last project briefing to the Water Resource Commission in August of 2008.

This is an informational item. No action is needed.

### **II. Background**

The WISE project, located in Jackson County, includes Bear Creek and Little Butte Creek, as well as the tributaries and reservoirs that serve these two watersheds. The WISE portion of the Bear Creek Watershed includes six municipalities within its boundaries: Medford, Ashland, Talent, Central Point, Phoenix, and Jacksonville. Agriculture is a significant economic driver in the two basins with more than 35,000 acres of irrigated agricultural lands served by the Talent, Medford, and Rogue River Valley Irrigation Districts. Numerous water users and regional stakeholders are involved in the project.

The current irrigation system is an arrangement of mostly earthen canals fed by six reservoirs: Four Mile Lake, Fish Lake, Howard Prairie Reservoir, Hyatt Reservoir, Agate Reservoir and Emigrant Lake. The canals intersect with Bear Creek and Little Butte Creek and their tributaries at various points.

The Little Butte Creek and Bear Creek watersheds suffer from unreliable irrigation water supplies; poor water quality and insufficient water quantity pose a challenge for water users and native anadromous salmonids. The irrigation infrastructure is more than a century old and accounts for a significant amount of water loss throughout the system. Losses due to leakage and evaporation are estimated at more than 30 percent of the water being diverted.

The WISE project proposes piping the entire irrigation infrastructure of more than 250 miles of canals and at least as many miles of smaller laterals. WISE estimates that this will conserve 45,000 acre-feet of water annually. The WISE project also proposes to expand Agate Reservoir and use reclaimed water from regional treatment facilities. Considered a long-term project, WISE will take approximately 5 to 10 years to construct, with a present cost estimate of \$450 million.

### **III. Recent Developments**

In 2012, the WISE project was designated by Governor Kitzhaber as an Oregon Solutions project, resulting in several outcomes and recommendations. For example, project members agreed to form a new governance structure under ORS 190.010, and to pursue funding to complete an environmental impact statement. The 2013 Legislature approved \$1.5 million in grant funding, made available through Business Oregon, to support the WISE project.

The Bureau of Reclamation is currently conducting a cost-benefit analysis, which received funding through the Department's Feasibility Study Grant Program. This analysis is scheduled for completion in Fall 2013.

### **IV. Conclusion**

WISE project members are particularly interested in the implementation of Recommended Action 9.A. of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy, "undertake place-based integrated water resources planning." WISE project partners are seeking guidance from Oregon's natural resource agencies to create a more comprehensive and integrated plan.

Several natural resource agencies involved in the development of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy have been invited to tour the WISE project area, scheduled for late May 2014. This represents an opportunity for the Department and its sister agencies to learn about the project's approach to integrated water resources management.