



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Water Resources Department

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Water Resources Commission

FROM: Racquel Rancier, Senior Policy Coordinator *RR*

SUBJECT: Agenda Item K, September 11, 2015
Water Resources Commission Meeting

Update on Drought Conditions & Governor Brown's Executive Order

I. Introduction

During this agenda item, staff will provide an update on Oregon's current drought conditions and response efforts, as well as longer-term efforts that are underway pursuant to Governor Brown's Executive Order 15-09.

II. Drought Conditions and Long-Term Outlook

Drought continues to persist across Oregon and much of the west. The U.S Drought Monitor reports that nearly 67 percent of the state is experiencing extreme drought conditions, as compared to 34 percent since our last Commission meeting in June.

The month of June was the warmest on record for Oregon, and average July temperatures along the Oregon and Washington coastlines reached record warm temperatures. Streamflows and reservoir levels continue to drop, with many streams experiencing near-record to record low flows.

The National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center's three-month outlook shows above average temperatures for the Pacific Northwest and below average precipitation for much of Oregon.

III. Emergency State and Federal Declarations

Since the last Commission meeting, the Governor has issued emergency drought declarations for Sherman County (June 22); Hood River, Union, and Curry Counties (July 20); and Linn County (August 26). To date, 24 out of Oregon's 36 counties are under a state drought declaration. Refer to Attachment 1 for a map showing current drought declarations.

Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Secretarial Declaration process, all 36 counties in Oregon are eligible for emergency federal assistance. Department staff have developed a document summarizing federal financial programs for drought emergencies, which is currently available on the Department's drought website.

IV. Proclamation and Executive Order 15-09

Governor Brown issued a proclamation on July 7th designating July as "Water Awareness Month," stating, "Water is the foundation for local economies and ecosystems, and essential to the health and well-being of Oregonians. Drought is a slow moving disaster, adopting responsible water use practices now will help reduce the impact of drought for years to come."

Later, on July 27, the Governor issued Executive Order 15-09 directing state agencies to plan for resiliency to drought and to meet the challenges of a changing climate. According to Governor Brown, "State government's efforts to address climate change must include reduced consumption and other conservation measures as water shortages become the new normal."

Executive Order 15-09 contains a number of state agency actions that support water conservation efforts across the state. More specifically, the Executive Order:

- Directs state agencies that own or manage land or facilities to reduce non-essential water use, with a goal of reducing use by 15 percent or more on December 31, 2020. To reach this goal, these agencies are also directed to:
 - Work with the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and the Water Resources Department to set a baseline of water use.
 - Identify and carry out short-term actions to reduce non-essential water for landscaping and exterior features, such as lawn watering, fountains, and window washing.
 - Carry out a moratorium on the installation of new non-essential landscaping that requires irrigation at state-owned buildings.
 - Display signs and messaging to encourage state employees to reduce their non-essential water use in state-owned buildings.
 - Assess leak detections systems and procedures to address leaks.
 - Consider social and disproportionate effects of actions to conserve water on underserved communities in making decisions.
 - Report to Governor Brown by November 1, 2015 and annually thereafter on progress, barriers, and future steps.
- Directs state agencies that lease facilities from private building owners to work with these owners to reduce non-essential water use at their buildings.
- Directs all state agencies to work with the Oregon Water Resources Department to conduct outreach to (a) encourage Oregonians to conserve water, and (b) to communicate how agencies are conserving water.

The Department is helping to facilitate implementation of this portion of the executive order in conjunction with DAS and the Governor's Office.

Some state agencies have already taken steps to reduce water use this summer. For example, DAS, which owns and operates several buildings in Salem, Portland, Central Point and Pendleton, has reduced landscape irrigation by 25 percent on all lawns and 15 percent in planted beds. In June, staff from the Department of Transportation noticed leaks in the irrigation system at its East Salem complex building and disconnected a portion of the system to prevent further loss. Water saving auto-faucets have also been installed in one of the largest buildings at the complex.

The Executive Order also directs the Department and the Office of Emergency Management to update the state's Emergency Operations Plan for drought response. The drought portion of the plan, referred to as the Drought Annex, was last updated in September 2002. The current Drought Annex describes the roles and responsibilities of state agencies during a drought emergency, as well as federal assistance programs, and guidelines for water curtailment planning for water utilities. Initial meetings have occurred with staff from the Governor's Office and the Oregon Office of Emergency Management to begin mapping out a timeline and process for the update.

Lastly, Governor Brown has requested that drought be incorporated into the 2017 Update to the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS).

Lessons learned this year will inform the update of the Annex and the IWRS, helping to identify opportunities for improvements in both emergency response tools and building long-term resiliency to drought events.

V. Ongoing Department Efforts

The Department has updated a number of its outreach materials in an effort to assist with drought. New water conservation brochures that offer tips for saving water are posted on the Department's website. In addition, the Oregon Health Authority and the Water Resources Department released a handbook in June for rural well owners, which includes information on proper well care and maintenance and ways to conserve groundwater during drought.

Staff also attended a two-day conference for state drought coordinators, climatologists, and emergency managers, hosted by the Western Governor's Association, the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), and the National Drought Mitigation Center. More than 60 people attended with representatives from 17 different western states.

The Department's Well Construction Program has also reached out to well drillers and pump installers, asking for their help in tracking well-related problems occurring this summer. Most often, homeowners will contact these companies directly when an issue arises, making it difficult for the Department to fully assess well-related problems during a drought year.

The Department is partnering with the U.S. Geological Survey to conduct low-flow measurements at 20 sites across the state, beginning in mid-August. This will provide support for the collection of streamflow information to document the severity and extent of the drought in Water Year 2015. The efforts are also aimed at assessing the vulnerability of water resources in the Western United States to climate change.

Finally, coordination continues to be a priority for the Department, conducting both internal weekly drought meetings with staff, as well as attending a monthly Drought Action Team convened by the Governor's Office. The Drought Action Team includes representatives from Oregon's congressional delegation, state and federal agencies, local governments, agriculture, businesses, and other partners whose purpose is to coordinate efforts to communicate drought related issues.

VI. Other Agencies Drought Efforts

Partner agencies are also implementing drought response strategies. In mid-July, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) curtailed fishing hours on most of Oregon's rivers to avoid additional stress on native fish already suffering from high water temperatures and low streamflows. ODFW is also reminding hunters that the drought and fire conditions may impact range for deer, elk and other species, noting that wildlife will have to travel farther for water. For these reasons, ODFW is asking hunters to not camp or set up blinds near watering holes to ensure that wildlife have adequate access.

The Oregon Department of Forestry and the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal have been working to manage fires across the state. They have asked for the public's help in preventing human-caused wildfires, and have also been issuing industrial precaution levels and public use closures and restrictions to try to prevent fires.

Similarly, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has banned campfires in all state park facilities.

The Oregon State Marine Board continues to update its boating access website with closure information due to low water levels at lakes and other sites.

The Governor's Office has launched a drought website as well, creating a central site that links to agency websites for more information.

VII. Next Steps

The Department will continue to work with local communities and coordinate response efforts as needed, while also working to implement and assist with actions called for in the Executive Order.

Staff will spend the next several months assisting state agencies with the water use reduction and reporting requirements detailed in the Governor's Executive Order, as well as engaging in efforts with the Office of Emergency Management to update the Drought Annex by the end of the year. Staff are also beginning to consider and evaluate future policies needed to effectively respond to and prepare for changing water conditions in the future.

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Attachment 1: Governor-Declared Drought Counties

