



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Water Resources Commission

FROM: Racquel Rancier, Senior Policy Coordinator *RR*

SUBJECT: Agenda Item D, November 19, 2015
Water Resources Commission Meeting

Drought 2015 - Recap of the 2015 Water Year & Update on Executive Order 15-09

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.

The Department has invited guests from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Health Authority, and the Oregon State Marine Board to provide observations on how the 2015 drought affected the state and to share management steps taken to help alleviate some of the impacts.

II. Drought Declarations

Since the last Commission meeting, the Governor issued one additional drought emergency for Marion County dated September 16, 2015.

In 2015, a total of 25 out of Oregon's 36 counties were under a state-issued drought emergency. This surpasses previous years of drought experienced in 2002, 2001, and 1994. In 1992, all 36 counties were under a state declaration.

Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Secretarial Declaration process, all 36 counties in Oregon were made eligible for emergency federal assistance.

III. Recap of Drought Conditions for 2015

Record warm temperatures made for a very challenging water year. The statewide average for streamflow during the 2015 water year was 64 percent. For much of southern Oregon, 2015 was the second or third year of drought, and the impacts continued to intensify. However, the areal extent and severity of this year's drought exceeded the two previous years for the state as a whole. Drought conditions affected agriculture, cities, recreation, fisheries and wildlife, and contributed to a very active wildfire season.

Warm temperatures led to a winter with record-low or near-record-low snowpack, contributing to dry soils and vegetation, as well as lower than normal streamflows and peak runoff occurring earlier in the year.

Many parts of Oregon experienced a dry and hot spring and summer, with periods of record-high temperatures, especially in western and northeast Oregon. This contributed to lower than normal streamflows in areas of the state, such as the coast, that do not rely on snowpack. Overall, it was the hottest June on record for most of Oregon and one of the hottest Julys on record. The meteorological summer— June through August—was also the hottest on record for many locations, with cities such as Portland, Salem, Eugene, Roseburg, Medford, and Klamath Falls setting new temperature records.

Precipitation and cooler temperatures in late August and September did provide some relief from extreme fire conditions, but only caused minor increases in streamflow for northwest Oregon rivers.

Several reservoirs in south-central and southeast Oregon had little or no remaining storage as of early September. For example, Warm Springs Reservoir's storage was zero percent of capacity and Owyhee Reservoir was two percent of capacity. In other parts of the state, reservoir storage was generally 10 to 50 percent of average.

Summary of the Wildfire Season

Dry conditions this year made for a very active fire season for the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). ODF protects 16 million acres of private and public forestlands from wildfire. This includes all private forestlands in Oregon as well as state- and local government-owned forests, along with 2.8 million acres of federal Bureau of Land Management lands in the western part of the state.

As of November 4, one-thousand and sixty-four fires had burned, affecting 87,791 acres on ODF protected areas. This is considerable, compared to the ten-year average of 967 fires totaling approximately 27,000 acres. According to the Oregon Department of Forestry, more than 631,000 acres burned on all forestland jurisdictions in Oregon and firefighting costs totaled \$240.5 million this year.

The largest fire this year was the Canyon Creek Complex fire, which started in mid-August and burned more than 110,000 acres. The wildfire destroyed 43 homes, and several barns and outbuildings. The fire was among the most destructive in Oregon's history. Before the Canyon Creek Complex fire, a pair of Bend wildfires -- the Awbrey Hall Fire that destroyed 22 homes in 1990 and the Skeleton Fire that burned 19 homes in 1996 -- had stood as the worst in terms of homes lost.

Predictions for this Winter

Drought conditions will evolve and change through this coming fall and may persist into this winter. The Climate Prediction Center has issued an El Niño advisory, stating there is an approximately 95% chance that El Niño will continue through the Northern Hemisphere winter 2015-16, gradually weakening through spring 2016. For Oregon, this means a high probability of warmer than normal temperatures and an uncertain precipitation outlook. It is very likely that Oregon will again have less than normal snowpack this coming winter.

IV. Update on Executive Order 15-09

On July 27, 2015, Governor Kate Brown signed Executive Order 15-09 *Directing State Agencies to Plan for Resiliency to Drought, to Meet the Challenge that a Changing Climate Brings*. Staff outlined the requirements of the Executive Order during the September 2015 Commission meeting.

A primary component of the Executive Order calls for state agencies that own or manage land or facilities to reduce non-essential water use in state-owned facilities by an aggregated 15 percent by December 31, 2020. Other agencies, boards and commissions under the direct authority of the Governor are subject to the Executive Order and are required to inform employees and the public about water-saving measures. Agencies in leased buildings are also directed to work with their building owner to find ways to reduce non-essential water use.

State agencies, boards, and commissions subject to the Executive Order were required to complete a Water Conservation and Efficiency Plan by October 1. Department staff developed a template to assist in this process. Plans were submitted to the Department so that staff could develop a consolidated report for the Governor. In November, the Department submitted the report to Governor Brown.

The second phase of implementation will include establishing a baseline of water use to determine water savings. Annual reporting will follow to provide information on actions taken, barriers encountered, and future steps to reducing non-essential water use.

The Executive Order also directs the Department and the Office of Emergency Management to update the drought portion of the state's Emergency Operations Plan, referred to as the Drought Annex, which was last updated in September 2002. The current Drought Annex describes the roles and responsibilities of state agencies and other partners during a drought emergency. Agencies have completed the first round of review and will be soliciting input from partner

agencies in early November. The Drought Annex update is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

V. Conclusion

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 are also beginning to consider and evaluate future policies needed to effectively respond to and prepare for changing water conditions in the future. As called for in the Governor's Executive Order, building drought resiliency will be a key theme for the 2017 Update to Oregon's Integrated Water Resources Strategy.

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