

Secretary of State Performance Audit of Oregon Water Resources Department

Oregon Water Resources Commission
January 26, 2017
Agenda Item A

Today's Discussion

- Background
- Review and Discuss Recommendations
- Next Steps

Secretary of State Audit Report

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Oregon Water Resources Department: Enhancing Sustainability Efforts and Agency Planning Needed to Better Address Oregon's Water Supply Needs

Executive Summary

Oregon is facing growing pressures and concerns related to its water supply. The Water Resources Department (WRD), charged with managing the state's water resources, could better balance water rights issuance and management with actions to sustain current and future water needs. The agency can also enhance its focus on groundwater protection, data collection and analysis, and workload and staffing. A long-term agency plan would help WRD strategically focus and prioritize the agency's efforts and align them with available resources.



Better balance needed to ensure water sustainability

Parts of the state are experiencing regular and large scale water supply availability issues. There are indications that this trend will continue, intensify, and spread. Many water sources in the state have been fully allocated, and groundwater levels are decreasing in several areas. By 2050, Oregon could be faced with a need for an additional 424 billion gallons of water per year to meet irrigation needs and municipal and industrial demand. Though Oregon is known as a rainy place, there is a limited amount of consumable water available for meeting all existing needs and new uses.

While issuing water rights has always been a key responsibility for WRD, actions to restore and protect streamflows and watersheds for long-term sustainability have received less attention. Related programs are limited in number and in participation. The demands that are putting pressure on Oregon's water supply are likely to continue to grow, which raises the need for action to ensure the ongoing sustainability of our water.

Groundwater protection needs more focus

Groundwater usage is increasing, and a large and growing number of wells go uninspected. Poor well construction may result in higher levels of

Performance Audit Background

- Initiated in February 2016
 - Scoping, planning, fieldwork, reporting
- Objective: What actions can take to better manage and conserve Oregon's water supply for future sustainability?
- Final report published December 15, 2016



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Recommendation 1

- Further integrate sustainability considerations into water management decisions to better meet full mission, including:
 - Expanding permit conditions
 - Developing mitigation initiatives and opportunities
 - Encouraging streamflow restoration/conservation efforts



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Recommendation 2

- Work with the Commission and Legislature to ensure water laws and rules for managing water meet current and future needs



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Recommendation 3

- Work with Governor's Office, Legislature, and other state agencies to further promote water conservation among all water users



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Recommendation 4

- Enhance well regulation efforts, including driller licensing and education, and inspections of new, abandoned, and known wells



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Recommendation 5

- Coordinate with other agencies to consolidate efforts and protect groundwater from potential risks



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Recommendation 6

- Strategically collect and analyze the information needed to help with decision-making related to the state's water supply and availability



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Recommendation 7

- Work with the Commission and Legislature to expand WRD's review and analysis of water use in the state



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Recommendation 8

- Assess field staff workload and align it with mission critical priorities and available resources



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Recommendation 9

- Develop a long-term plan for the agency that prioritizes its responsibilities and sets clear, measurable goals for water sustainability



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Recommendation 10

- Continue efforts to improve internal communications



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Recommendation 11

- Increase efforts to educate the public on water use and water laws



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Recommendation 12

- Better communicate agency priorities, goals and resource needs to the Commission and Legislature



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Recommendation 13

- Establish a process to periodically solicit feedback on plans and programs, then review and revise them as needed to ensure they are fulfilling their intent

Next Steps

- Determine Priorities
 - Focus on recommendations that will make WRD most effective in long-term
 - Focus on recommendations that are achievable
 - Consider actions that will address multiple recommendations

Next Steps

- Director recommendation:
 - Focus on Long-term Planning (Rec #9)
 - Prioritize IWRS actions and develop work plans
 - Use planning process to also address other recommendations (#1, 8 and 10-13)
 - Continue efforts to address other recommendations (#2-7)