



Oregon's 100-Year Water Vision: A Call to Action

Water Vision Phase II Overall Process Recommendations

Overview

Throughout the fall and winter, staff received extensive feedback on what a future process related to the 100-Year Water Vision should look like. That feedback can be found in the community engagement and feedback summary, the interview summary, and individual feedback, available at www.OregonWaterVision.org. That information forms the basis for these recommendations.

This document provides a broad summary of the approach that will be taken for the next phase of this work, if funded in the 2020 Legislative Session. It is not designed to be a comprehensive timeline or detailed process document. Rather, it highlights the approaches and principles to be followed. Details are being finalized and will be provided following the legislative session.

Feedback was clear that a fully inclusive process, with a strong cross-sector of people from tribes, local governments, agriculture and other businesses, environmental justice communities, health advocates, environmentalists, and urban and rural communities all represented, is the only way to ensure success, both for the next phase, and for communities to plan their water futures together. All participants must have both the opportunity to participate and access to resources if needed. That tenant will form the basis of the process moving forward.

Based on feedback from the fall, Governor Brown has already announced the formation of a Water Future Advisory Council following the 2020 Legislative Session, contingent on funding. She has also announced the objectives outlined below. The Water Future Advisory Council will provide oversight for the process, and other group processes will be established in coordination with partners to work on specific objectives. Additional details and timelines will be provided following the 2020 Legislative Session.

Phase II Outcomes and Objectives

The state received a diversity of feedback on what the focus of next steps in the process should entail. These ranged from a full overhaul of Oregon's water rights, land use laws, and water quality laws, to focusing only on investments in water infrastructure.

The next phase will address two key outcomes: 1) improving funding coordination and increasing funding available in both the short and long term for built and natural water infrastructure and ecosystems, and 2) developing and investing in the public engagement, governance, information, and capacity systems needed to ensure communities can strategically plan for, design, and implement water investments. With those two outcomes in mind, the next phase will focus specifically on the following objectives:

Community Capacity: Recommend approaches to help communities engage individuals equitably, and expand capabilities to strategically plan for and implement actions to pursue their water futures.

Water Investment Governance: Recommend a framework for local, regional, and statewide governance that will lead to state-supported, regionally appropriate approaches to prioritize water investments with a focus on ensuring all individuals are represented.

Water Funding: Recommend approaches to increase funding coordination, identify early investment needs and funding gaps, and new funding sources that support community water planning, implementation, innovation, and evaluation.

Engaging Oregonians: Recommend approaches to help Oregonians better understand the vital importance of water, the water challenges we face, and the need for all of us to work together and support strategic water investments.

Data and Information Systems: Recommend data needs, tools, and information delivery systems that will help local communities and funders better understand current water and infrastructure conditions, and future water trends, to inform strategic decision-making at all levels.

The process will not focus on policy or statutory changes, except those recommended as a part of the advisory council process to advance the objectives outlined above.

While the process will highlight broad-scale investment opportunities for the 2021 legislative session, the next phase is not intended to prioritize individual community project investments. Rather, the process will help to establish a state and regional framework for how investments should be strategically coordinated and prioritized.

Coordination with Integrated Water Resources Strategy and House Water Committee

Throughout the fall, participants wanted a better understanding of the connection between the 100-Year Water Vision, the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS), and the House Water Committee, as they are all important and require investment of time and resources for stakeholders, elected officials, and staff.

With respect to work between the House Water Committee and the state agencies working on water, both branches of government play a key role, operating in a coordinated and collaborative fashion. While specific initiatives may vary based on legislative or agency needs, the work of agencies and the focus of the House Water Committee provide an opportunity to collaboratively elevate the importance of this critical community, environment, and economic issue.

Regarding the connection between the IWRS and the 100-Year Water Vision, the IWRS is the state's foundational blueprint for water. The Vision is the catalyst to invest strategically in Oregon's water future, using the IWRS as the foundation, and carrying forward many of its recommended actions. Staff in agencies working on both the IWRS and the Water Vision are committed to ensuring work and feedback provided through both processes is coordinated and clear, and not duplicative. As an example, the IWRS has a required update to be completed in 2022. The update process will be initiated in the near future. All input received through the Vision process in the fall will be provided to support the next IWRS update.

Short and Long-Term Approach

To continue to build on the strong momentum begun this fall, the process must lead to real-world successes in both the short and long terms. As an example, providing good information for effective decision-making and investing in strategic projects for communities and projects in the short term is important. Giving all communities access to the resources to plan more strategically, and developing governance systems that allow for regional prioritization has long-term benefits. Public engagement, community capacity, and governance are long-term needs that will also benefit from short-term investments. While the next phase will not end with the 2021 Legislative Session, it will identify strategic funding needs in that session. The process will also identify a framework to achieve large-scale investments for the 2023 session and beyond.

Principles

The principles below are provided in the updated 100-Year Water Vision, but bear repeating here, as they form the commitments that will be followed throughout Phase II and beyond. These principles were identified throughout the fall, and many are similar to those in the IWRS.

Balancing Interests: Water is an essential but limited resource. We recognize there is not enough water to meet every ‘want.’ We will seek to balance interests across all of our water goals, and recognize the best solutions should address multiple uses. (*IWRS Principles - Balance, Sustainability, Interconnection/Integration*)

State Framework with Regional and Local Flexibility: Water challenges and opportunities vary greatly from region to region across the state. Successful strategic solutions and investments will build on flexible approaches that respect regional differences. These approaches should be both supported and bounded by a state framework, grounded in current water law, with clear policies to define the direction. (*IWRS Principles - Science-Based, Flexible Approaches, Implementation, Facilitation by the state*)

Tribal Sovereignty: Oregon’s water future is best implemented when we work in partnership with the sovereign tribes in Oregon, respecting both treaty rights and tribal cultural connections to water.

Equity & Transparency: The benefits of clean and reliable water are shared by all who live here, along with our native fish and wildlife. We will build a more equitable water future by ensuring our water decisions and investments are inclusive and transparent, with opportunities for all communities to participate. (*IWRS Principles - Public Process*)

Affordability: Improvements to our infrastructure and ecosystems come with costs. We will ensure that those costs are not disproportionately borne by those who can least afford it. (*IWRS Principles - Reasonable Cost*)

Infrastructure & Ecosystems: Oregon’s water goals can be met in many ways. We recognize that built systems like dams, pipes, levees are only one part of the solution. Natural systems like wetlands, estuaries, and rivers themselves must also be part of Oregon’s water future - both as natural

infrastructure that provides clean water for human use, and as the components of a healthy ecosystem for fish and wildlife.

Coordination & Collaboration: We support formation of regional, coordinated, and collaborative partnerships that include representatives of local, state, federal, and tribal government, private and non-profit sectors, stakeholders, and the public to plan and invest strategically. (*IWRS Principles - Collaboration, Incentives*)

Engaged Oregonians: Engaged community members and water leaders are key to helping all of us who live in Oregon understand the value water as part of our culture, our communities, and our ecosystems. We will cultivate leaders in communities across Oregon that understand the importance of conserving and keeping our water clean, and recognize the need for coordinated water investments.

Innovation: Working with creative individuals and businesses across the state, we will invest in innovative solutions that balance the advantages of built, and natural infrastructure, while also protecting ecosystem values.

Best Use of Available Science Combined with Local Knowledge: The best solutions come when we recognize that both science and local knowledge have value. We will build investment approaches that allow for learning, adaptation, and innovative ideas. (*IWRS Principles - Science-Based, Flexible Approaches*)

Water as a public resource: Public investments in our water future should result in public benefits.

Capacity and commitment to implement future water vision work

In order for future phases of this conversation to be successful, there was strong feedback that the state must demonstrate leadership, including initial investments to organize and move the process forward. The work needs to be adequately funded and staffed. Outside facilitation will be key to an inclusive process, which also requires investment. Governor Brown has prioritized Water Vision Implementation funding as a part of her 2020 budget request, including staffing and contract dollars.

In addition to resources for facilitation, stakeholders who have been involved in the IWRS and agency work related to water quality, quantity, infrastructure, and ecosystem investments were concerned that, if future phases of this work fall to existing staff, other critical water-related work will fall to the wayside. Agency staff agree with this assessment. Without funding for the next phase, staff recommend focusing on only the limited objective of increasing funding coordination and identifying potential new funding sources. Other work is not feasible with existing staff resources. Other organizations or the legislature may be interested in picking up other objectives.

Finally, successful implementation of future phases requires a commitment to ensuring broad engagement and frequent communication with diverse stakeholders, and ensuring information is accessible and available. With funding, staff are committed to updating the website, hosting meetings with tribes and communities, and distributing information in a timely manner through multiple venues. Agencies will work with partners who are already engaged in this work to coordinate wherever feasible.