



Summary of Senate Bill 193

Developing and Communicating an Integrated Water Resources Strategy

Goal

Build upon the Department's statutory authority to develop an integrated water resources strategy.

Proposal

This Bill would build upon the already-existing statutory language in ORS 536.220, to clarify the lead role the Water Resources Department will play in the development of an integrated water resources strategy. The Department of Environmental Quality will be responsible for developing water quality-specific narratives and data in the strategy.

The draft concept emphasizes the need to work with a full spectrum of stakeholders, including the other natural resources agencies. It also notes the importance of continued data collection and quantification of water needs. The draft concept describes additional components of a strategy, including: objectives, actions to achieve the objectives, adaptation plans related to climate change, an assessment of additional factors such as population growth or land-use change, and public policy options and recommendations.

The draft concept notes that the strategy shall take effect upon adoption by both the Water Resources Commission and Environmental Quality Commission, with an initial progress report due Feb. 1, 2011, and the first completed strategy due Dec. 12, 2012. Updates should be completed every five years thereafter. Ensuing reports to the Oregon Legislature may include legislative concepts or budget recommendations.

Background

The mission of the Water Resources Commission and Department is to serve the public by practicing and promoting responsible long-term water management. The Commission has co-equal goals of directly addressing Oregon's water supply needs and restoring and protecting stream flows and watersheds. The Commission and Department recognize the need to engage in long-term planning, while simultaneously addressing very pressing and critical water needs in some of Oregon's communities.

Surface water is almost completely allocated, and as Oregon relies increasingly on our ground water resources, water levels have dropped precipitously in some areas of the state. Without solutions in place, water supply shortages will multiply in future years because of a population projected to grow by another 1 million people by 2030, and the changed timing and form of precipitation resulting from climate change.

Oregon is one of two western states without a formal water supply plan." Hardly any other states have produced good examples of a long-term, integrated water resources strategy. Oregon's Water Resources Commission recognizes the importance of an integrated water resources strategy that takes into account not only water quantity, but also water quality, and ecosystem needs. This Bill represents, in essence, "leapfrogging" over the development of a water supply-only strategy, and going straight to an integrated one.

Time-Line Thus Far

- 2007 -* From the 2007 Legislature, the Department secured funds to begin a data-gathering exercise, to help increase the state's ability to forecast water demands, as well as to identify opportunities for water conservation and water storage. This exercise, called the Oregon Water Supply and Conservation Initiative, began in 2007, and began to yield the first of pieces of data in 2008. These modest data collection efforts set the stage for additional work the Water Resources Department needs to conduct to analyze the state's water needs and water supplies now and into the future.
- Feb. 2008 -* In the 2008 Legislative Session, the Department received resources to investigate the feasibility of capturing and storing winter flows in underground storage aquifers. In 2008, the Legislature also provided cost-share funding for communities engaged in long-term water planning. In 2009, the Department will build upon these data-gathering and partnership efforts, seeking support to develop an integrated, state-wide water resource strategy. This process will rely heavily on scientific data and local input, and help us meet Oregon's instream and out-of-stream water needs.
- May 2008 -* During the May 2008 Water Resources Commission Meeting, the Commission began to discuss some of the fundamentals that a long-term water conservation and supply strategy might contain, in terms of both process and content.
- Aug. 2008 -* During the August 2008 Commission workshop, visiting colleagues from Washington and California discussed their experiences and lessons learned with regard to statewide water resources planning.
- Nov. 2008 -* The November 2008 Commission workshop filled in more details, as the Commissioner explored: ensuring public input, determining the primary focus of a water resource strategy, and ensuring the utility of such a strategy.

Supporters

The Water Resources Commission has long identified the need to develop a strategy as an important next step in meeting Oregon's current and future water needs. With similar calls for planning coming from the Governor's H₂O Initiative and the Oregon Water Roundtables hosted during Fall 2008 by Representatives Jackie Dingfelder and Cliff Bentz, the time is right to continue to develop the details and timelines that continue the momentum toward a strategy.

Special Note

This Bill is accompanied by a budget request from the Water Resources Department for three full-time equivalent staff (FTE) for water demand forecasting, public outreach, and technical analysis/writing (see OWRD Policy Option Package #102, totaling \$473,520 during the next biennium). It is also accompanied by a fiscal impact form from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, requesting one FTE, for a total of \$225,565.

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