

# Oregon Water Resources Department Environmental Justice Report

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OREGON



WATER RESOURCES  
DEPARTMENT



Annual Report for the Environmental Justice Council: 2023

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# Introduction

## Oregon Water Resources Department Mission Statement

The vision of the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) is to assure sufficient and sustainable water supplies are available to meet current and future needs.

OWRD's mission is to serve the public by practicing and promoting responsible water management through two key goals:

- To directly address Oregon's water supply needs.
- To restore and protect streamflows and watersheds in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of Oregon's ecosystems, economy, and quality of life.

OWRD is one of the natural resource agencies listed in HB 4077 and committed to supporting its efforts toward environmental justice.

## OWRD Leadership

**Acting Director:** Douglas Woodcock

Deputy Director, Strategy and Administration: Racquel Rancier

Acting Deputy Director, Water Management: Ivan Gall

**Oregon Water Resources Commission** is OWRD's advisory board ([Water Resources Department : Water Resources Commission : Water Resources Commission : State of Oregon](#)).

## Environmental Justice Personnel

To advance racial and environmental justice, as well as foster diversity, equity, and inclusion, the agency needs staff dedicated to this work to build relationships with BIPOC and rural communities and other underrepresented or under-resourced groups; to identify data collection that can inform equity work; to evaluate communications, programs, policies, and services through an equity lens; and to ultimately provide guidance, expertise, and advice to the agency. This work requires a long-term effort to build trust and collaboration and cannot be accomplished in one biennium.

As a result, the 2023 Governor's Recommended Budget for OWRD included a policy option package proposing two positions responsible for leading the agency's efforts in advancing environmental and racial justice and diversity, equity and inclusion. These positions would have increased the agency's capacity to reach underrepresented and underserved groups, including BIPOC and rural communities, as well as to create a workplace culture that is welcoming and inclusive to all. The package also contained \$500,000 in base budget funding for services and supplies, which would be used for: training, translating materials, conducting an organizational assessment, conducting engagement and outreach with BIPOC and environmental justice communities, and for providing incentives and accommodations to participate in Department rules advisory committees, workgroups, and other engagement efforts.

This package was not funded by the 2023 Oregon Legislature. As a result, the Department does not have dedicated environmental justice staff. Despite the lack of staffing, OWRD staff leveraged

available resources in 2023 to move equity priorities forward by: 1) Hiring temporary staff to shepherd immediate equity priorities, and 2) utilizing training opportunities to ground OWRD staff in equity principles and practices. *Note that the Department may not have the same opportunities in the future, as the funding sources for some of these activities no longer exist or were based on project specific funding.* A description of these investments follows:

1. **Equity, Environmental Justice and Racial Justice Specialist** (March - June 2023) – This temporary staff person was hired to work on the Planning, Collaboration and Investments team with the agencies involved in [HB3293](#) (2021), researching environmental justice frameworks and best practices for equity-centered community engagement. This resulted in a draft project plan, an organized working group of the state agencies identified in the bill and a rough draft of Best Practices of Community Engagement for the working group to continue to refine. A Community Engagement Coordinator hired in late spring has continued this work as described later in this report.
2. **DEI Plan Project Coordinator** (March - June 2023): A temporary project coordinator was hired to support the development of the approach for developing and incorporating a DEI plan into OWRD’s strategic plan.
3. **Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS) Equity and Environmental Justice Policy Analyst** (March - June 2023): This temporary position developed a report and presented the findings on DEI principles and evaluating the IWRS process and outcomes. Recommendations were made for more inclusive approaches for the development of the next plan and considered both racial and environmental justice. The approaches she articulated translates to other bodies of work and can inform next strategic plan being developed in 2024.
4. **Inclusive Leadership Series** (May - June 2023): OWRD managers participated in this four-part training series led by Daryl Dixon from Cascade Employers Association. The training provided the history of how policy and workflows impact people of color and how past injustices show up in today’s workplace. There was a big focus on how to identify historical bias and exclusion, and how to be more inclusive leaders.
5. **Equity Trainings for staff:** OWRD’s DEI team worked closely with contracted equity facilitators to offer equity trainings in 2023 for interested staff and managers. The Center for Diversity and the Environment provided two 4-hour trainings, the first DEI trainings customized specifically for OWRD, to continue to build understanding of equity principles and practices in natural resource organizations. “No Magic Shortcut” and “Catalyzing Change Within OWRD” were offered to all staff in May-June of 2023, and over 50 staff participated. OWRD contracted with the Avarna Group to provide two trainings to over 80 staff (“The What & Why of DEIJ and “The House of DEIJ). Recordings of those webinar trainings and a DEIJ vocabulary sheet were emailed to all agency staff. The DEI Team participated in two additional webinars with the Avarna Group.

## Agency Budget and Revenue Sources

- Identify key environmental justice personnel within the agency.

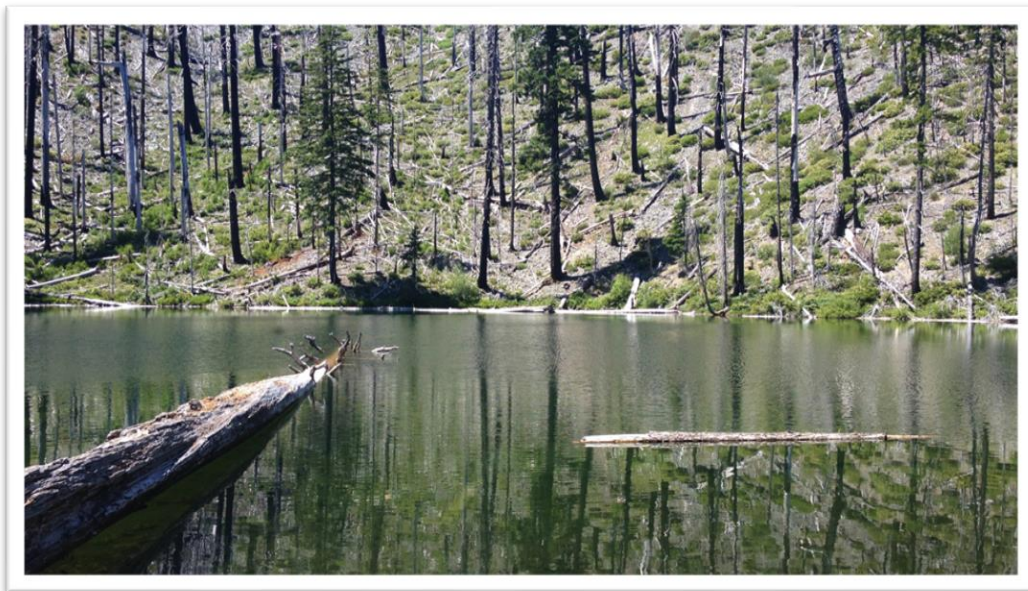
There is no designated budget or resources specifically for environmental justice in the 2023-2025 biennial budget. Staff members spend a portion of their time working on environmental justice issues and the agency is seeking to integrate DEI-EJ considerations and best practices into agency programs. Without dedicated staff to help, however, this means that the agency is slowly making progress and some programs are further along than others.

For example, several staff serve on an agency DEI team, which has helped the agency work on projects to improve some of its recruitment practices and provide training. These staff members volunteer to be a part of the team and work is performed as paid time during regular work hours, in addition to their regular position responsibilities. Another example are the three full-time Community Engagement Coordinators who incorporate environmental justice values into their community engagement work (see more on these new positions below). Staff working on rulemakings and other policy and budget development have also sought to be make our processes more inclusive and transparent, as well as to engage water justice advocates. Communications staff have worked to increase accessibility of our communications and where possible develop alternative language formats for materials within the limited agency budget and capacity. Integrated Water Resources Strategy staff worked with Oregon's Kitchen Table to try to reach populations that the agency has not engaged with in the past. As a result, while the agency doesn't have dedicated resources, we are still making progress where we can with existing staff.

## Environmental Justice Highlights

1. **Integration of Environmental Justice into revised Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS)** is a statewide document that provides an outline for how we can both better understand our water resources, and better meet our state's water needs. The first IWRS was published in 2012, the second in 2017, and work is underway on the next update. Public outreach and engagement efforts were conducted in May and June of 2023, designed specifically to broaden our reach to communities that have not historically participated in the IWRS process. Later in 2023, OWRD led the draft IWRS development, with assistance from many other agencies. During this process, OWRD hired a temporary employee with extensive background in EJ issues to help review the 2017 IWRS and make recommendations. The IWRS project team is working to integrate these recommendations by adding environmental justice focused example actions for each IWRS action. The first draft of the IWRS will be released for public review and comment in March 2024.
2. **House Bill 3293** provides six state agencies the ability to provide funding to help water project developers conduct outreach to communities and community members so their voices are heard and integrated into decisions regarding water projects. To this end, the bill instructed the named agencies to coordinate and develop Best Practices for Community Engagement and to recognize them in each agency's Oregon Administrative Rules to help guide community engagement for work funded as authorized in the bill. These Best Practices are under development and informed by conversations with agency partners, local organizations, local governments, and others working in the field of community engagement. The Best Practices will then be followed by water project developers that receive funding to undertake the work authorized under this bill.
3. **Community Engagement Coordinators** were hired in the last eighteen months with funding authorized by the 2021 legislature. These three new positions bring much-needed capacity to surface community concerns/barriers and collaborate around solutions related to access to water and water management. This team is providing technical assistance or resources where appropriate, and developing relationships and connections intended to propagate a more collaborative relationship between communities and OWRD. In 2024, CECs will be implementing the Community Engagement Foundations (discussed below); coordinating cross-agency agreements re: HB3293 Best Practices; providing engagement activities for water budget-related data (HB2018) and other technical initiatives; and providing focused community engagement services to various communities around the state.
4. **Community Engagement Foundations** is a framework and set of tools being developed to guide community engagement by staff across the agency. This framework will include fundamental equity principles, such as identifying and engaging stakeholders potentially impacted by a project or program early and often, expanding the stakeholders with which OWRD generally engages, and integrating questions into project planning that generate shared decision-making or more robust and/or culturally responsive communication when appropriate. In 2024, the draft framework will be completed and piloted (and then refined) with interested teams within OWRD.

5. [The Business Case for Investing in Water in Oregon](#) quantified at a high-level, the economic and non-economic value of water in Oregon. OWRD contracted with an economics firm to produce an overview of the risks Oregon faces, including water management, current beneficial water use, and the demographics of the state. The risks identified included environmental justice and the disproportionate impacts on frontline communities as the competition for scarce resources increases. The report also included: an economic analysis including economic value and benefits to the state from key water related industries and activities; select tribal perspectives; illustrative case studies from around the state; and a final discussion on the cost effectiveness of investment over non-investment in water around Oregon. The economic analysis is intended to show how water is a significant driver of Oregon’s total economy.
6. **The DEI Team** is an agency team organized to promote equity, diversity, inclusion, and environmental justice in the Department. After partnering with the Employee Services Section to deliver a series of DEI trainings to staff in 2023 (see investment description above), the DEI Team plans to host learning opportunities and discussion groups for staff in 2024.



*Babyfoot Lake in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness post-Biscuit Fire; Selma, OR*

# Environmental Justice Considerations (ORS 182.550 Section 1)

## Environmental Justice Consideration Process

OWRD does not yet have in place a formal system for tracking environmental justice issues that have been identified. It would be beneficial to have systems that could better capture the best observations and thinking that come from identifying racial justice issues within the department.

OWRD staff are actively working to create structure and formalize processes that progress equity practices in a more consistent manner. For instance, OWRD is actively addressing a backlog in rulemakings. This has given staff an opportunity to improve on what has been done before. Below are some of the improvements recently implemented or in the process of being implemented:

- Broadening representation on Rulemaking Advisory Committees and holding more meetings to increase input.
- Utilizing GovDelivery to communicate about the process – this allows the public to choose what information they want to receive and receive it automatically.
- Broadening knowledge of process and water policy by holding trainings that enable people who do not specialize in water issues, or come from a community further from decision-making processes, to meaningfully participate.
- Updating rulemaking information on our website - all prospective rules are now together with summary, contact information, engagement opportunities and timelines, and all information related to each bill.
- Imbedding equity-centered questions that identify environmental and fiscal impacts, and people impacted by a rulemaking, earlier in the rulemaking process.

As these practices are being put in place, templates are being developed that can be used for facilitating similar processes in other sections of the agency.

The community engagement team is in the middle of a similar progression, identifying changes that can be made that result in broader and more equitable community engagement, and setting up processes and supports that enable those changes to take root in the department (more about this below in Meaningful Public Participation).

Another environmental justice consideration beginning to be addressed is the gap between the complex science that is foundational to OWRD's water management activities - from rules development to supporting place-based planning – and the public's understanding of water systems. With legislative support (HB2018, OR Water Data Portal, HB2010), OWRD is increasing its capacity to do community engagement, public outreach, and develop information portals for the public to better access and utilize the latest scientific information related to water.



OWRD's work is highly dependent on Western Water Law, which dictates that some people will have priority over others based on when water was first used. In some cases, this may be before Oregon's statehood. This results in unequal access to water. Our role as an agency is to regulate to existing law.

## Environmental Justice Community Considerations

- How does your agency define environmental justice communities?
- What tools does your agency use to identify and prioritize environmental justice communities?

OWRD uses the definition of "environmental justice community" found in ORS 182.535(4), which states that an "environmental justice community" includes communities of color, communities experiencing lower incomes, communities experiencing health inequities, tribal communities, rural communities, remote communities, coastal communities, communities with limited infrastructure and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including seniors, youth and persons with disabilities." To help ensure that these communities are considered/engaged, OWRD aims to use the questions found in the [2021 Governor's DEI Action Plan](#), Racial Equity Toolkit (pp. 35-40). As noted above, OWRD is working to develop a more formalized process for environmental justice considerations.

# Public Participation and Meaningful Involvement (ORS 182.535 Section 2)

## Increase Public participation of Individuals and Communities Affected by Agency Decisions

This is an area of opportunity at OWRD. With three new community engagement staff now onboard, there are engagement activities happening in specific regions, and at the same time staff are developing guidance to have a more consistent approach as an agency and generally improve our engagement processes.

To work on geographic equity, OWRD has focused on hiring engagement staff around the state. Where these staff focus their regional work is still determined by the urgency of regional water issues as each of the three CECs have huge areas in which they are providing support. These engagement staff are a key step in shifting to more responsive approaches instead of continually reacting to crises. These important shifts are happening because OWRD has clearly identified that water-related issues in the state continue to be more complex and that community partnerships and place-based solutions are key strategies to better prepare for a sustainable water future.

## Public Engagement Policy Processes

- Does your agency have a public engagement process for promoting community participation in agency decision-making processes?

Public engagement approaches currently vary across the agency. In 2024, community engagement staff will be piloting the Community Engagement Foundations to create more consistent and defined processes. Engagement also varies based on how a decision-making process is statutorily defined. Statewide rulemakings or regulatory actions have a more defined process for engagement and OWRD continues to refine its approaches to maximize opportunities for public input and consultation. Engagement opportunities such as sharing scientific findings about Oregon's water, or supporting communities to address water challenges at the local level, are areas where OWRD is investing in additional staff to better support local decision-making and cooperative water management.

- Describe the current level and quality of public participation.

The type and quality of public participation depends on the project and desired outcome. A recent survey of OWRD staff regarding public engagement indicated a focus on sharing information (water law, policy and science can be complex) with a wide range of technical assistance offered as well. Many staff noted the importance of relationship and listening as well as going out into communities to meet with people to work through complex issues together. Staff also reported a desire to have better participation when they are seeking public input, and as described in Community Engagement Considerations above, have been taking steps to grow in this area.

Community engagement staff have been using the [IAP2 Spectrum](#) to describe public involvement in agency decisions and activities. In 2024, OWRD staff will be introduced to this spectrum along with

other engagement planning tools, so staff can integrate community engagement activities where appropriate as projects and decisions are being planned.

## Selected Audiences

- Has the agency performed an analysis to determine the stakeholder groups impacted by agency decisions?

An agency-wide analysis has not been conducted in recent years. Stakeholder analysis is typically done at the project level. As the agency continues to grow and evaluate engagement processes, developing a consistent system for cataloguing this information would help with staff capacity limitations and help staff identify who should be invited to the table when it comes to an agency decision or project.

- With which stakeholders does your agency engage?

In December 2023, OWRD staff from sections that engage with the public were asked a series of questions to better understand how OWRD currently engage with the public. Sixty-eight staff responded via interview or survey.

The questions were phrased broadly, beyond a strict definition of community engagement, to capture how, with whom and for what purpose staff from varying sections of the agency engage with the public. These results are being used to guide the evolution and support for public engagement for the department. The analysis of responses is underway and full results will be available in the spring of 2024.

In an initial data review, landowners and other individual members of the public, other agencies, local governments (and their representatives), conservation groups, municipal water suppliers and irrigation districts were the most common responses provided by OWRD staff when asked with which external partners they regularly engage. Other partners identified were tribal nations, universities/researchers, other community organizations, K-12 schools, realtors, Certified Water Rights Examiners, well drillers, policy makers, funders, cannabis growers, neighbors (often a complainant), and water haulers. Staff working in a region were much more likely to mention community-based partners. Statewide staff mentioned working with coalitions of community-based partners, such as place-based planning groups.

The Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) also works closely with Oregon's nine federally recognized Indian Tribes on issues related to water supply, watershed management, and water distribution, including water rights held or claimed by the Tribes and/or tribal members. In 1997, OWRD adopted a Government-to-Government policy statement that focused on two main points: we must honor and protect existing tribal rights to use water, and we must continue to forge partnerships to share responsibility for water management. Those partnerships are improved through regular communication and participation in the Natural Resources Working Group and the Cultural Resources Cluster Group. Annually, OWRD submits a [Government-to-Government Report](#) to

Oregon's [Legislative Commission on Indian Services](#), summarizing OWRD work with Oregon's nine Tribal Governments.

## Public Engagement Policy

- Describe policy if applicable. If not applicable, describe progress towards development.

At this time the Department does not have an agency-wide public engagement policy. Community Engagement Coordinators will be working on community engagement foundations and tools for the agency in 2024. Once OWRD leadership has had a chance to review then next steps on whether further guidance is needed.

## Meaningful Engagement

- What is the extent of meaningful engagement?

This information was also gathered by Community Engagement staff in December 2023 and the results are currently being analyzed. The results will be shared back to agency staff with tools and supports to continue to grow and deepen our public engagement as an agency.

OWRD has significantly grown in engagement staff in 2023 as the agency is committed to increase and improve its engagement activities. As noted in this report, there is a lot of planning activity regarding meaningful engagement, and the areas for improvement shift based on activity.

Sometimes OWRD is statutorily directed to consider only certain criteria, for example, in water rights transactions. In these circumstances, department staff provides the public due process as directed by the legislation and can work to improve the breadth of engagement as described above in Environmental Justice Considerations.

OWRD staff are also actively cultivating opportunities to engage with a broader set of the public that is interested in water issues. For example, OWRD contracted with Oregon's Kitchen Table at the National Policy Consensus Center in 2023 to increase community engagement in the IWRS revisions to communities typically underrepresented in the process and experienced some broader participation. While OWRD increased engagement, it also heard that some ongoing stakeholders wanted to have more engagement in the process. How OWRD staff engage with stakeholders with a long history in water while ensuring anyone ultimately affected is aware of and has the opportunity to provide input in a project or decision, is an area of growth for the agency. Having an equity coordinator would provide the capacity to make progress on this important growth point for the agency.

## Follow-up

- Does your agency follow-up with participants after decisions are made?

There are varying degrees of follow up based on the issue and staff capacity. OWRD staff consistently follow up with funding applicants, Rules Advisory Committees, and those asking for specific technical assistance or customer service. OWRD's follow up for broad public participation processes has generally been to respond to comments and share with its Commission, which welcomes public comment.



*Integrated Water Resources Strategy  
Community Outreach Meeting in Seaside*

“The IWRS Update engagement included a survey available in nine different languages and coordination with many community organizers to ensure input from a wide range of voices” - Crystal Grinnell, OWRD Integrated Water Resource Strategy Specialist

## Environmental Justice Impacts (ORS 182.550 Section 3)

### Determine the effect of agency decisions on environmental justice communities.

- Does your agency measure the impacts of agency decisions on environmental justice in Oregon communities? Why or why not?

As stated previously in this report, OWRD staff are actively working to engage a broader set of constituents and develop processes that better evaluate our impact on these communities.

Historically, we have lacked resources and understanding, which has made it challenging to identify who is impacted and successful strategies for meaningfully engaging with those that are impacted. OWRD has broadened its understanding but has more work to do in this area.

The Community Engagement Foundations mentioned above will include recommendations for identifying who could be potentially impacted both directly and indirectly and developing outreach strategies accordingly. However, the challenge for the agency is that water touches every single person in the state. There are certain entities that regularly engage and are directly affected, but the implications ultimately affect everyone. OWRD does not have a budget to support engagement or communications work that has a broad statewide impact, so it will need to be strategic and prioritize work as it moves forward.

## Environmental Justice Progress (ORS 182.550 Section 4)

### ORS 182.550 Section 4: Improve plans to further improve environmental justice in Oregon;

- How is EJ built into agency strategic plans?
- What does your agency need to further develop and implement environmental justice policies at the agency?

OWRD will be updating its strategic plan in alignment with the Governor's January 2023 expectations. As OWRD is currently in the middle of a Director transition, OWRD, Department of Administrative Services and the Governor's Office have agreed to delay plan submittal deadlines, so the new Director can have an active hand in developing the agency's upcoming goals and priorities. OWRD's next strategic plan will include actions to advance diversity, equity and inclusion, and the agency will be participating in the agency DEI cohorts organized by the Department of Administrative Services. The Department is currently scoping out a workplan and anticipates that the next strategic plan will be adopted in 2024 or 2025.

Many of the strategies and activities mentioned above will be foundational to OWRD's next strategic plan, with continued equity work a key focus. For example, the IWRS provides a snapshot of the work happening across agencies, and recommended strategies for moving equity forward. The community engagement and place-based planning staff continue to bring forward the impacts of water management on communities and their needs as we prepare for the plan. Much of the work highlighted in this report will inform OWRD's new strategic plan.

OWRD is still in the planning stages for the 2025-2027 Budget and Legislative Concepts. We will update these developments in next year's report. OWRD does not have any legislative asks in the 2024 (short) session.

The following would greatly support OWRD in developing and implementing environmental justice policies across the agency:

1. **Environmental Justice Coordinator**: As stated previously, OWRD has already identified the need for dedicated environmental justice staff. This is critical to setting and articulating a vision for EJ; developing more consistent policies and procedures; and supporting consistent practices across the various teams and sections.
2. **Facilitation training**: This would enable our staff to be better listeners and ensure we are making space for all voices when engaging with community.
3. **Communication classes**: These were offered in 2023 and some of our teams participated as part of their professional development. This is hugely helpful as staff engage with the public around often contentious water issues.
4. **Resources for training, communication and outreach to EJ communities**: The addition of one communications coordinator and three community engagement coordinators in 2023 will enable

OWRD to develop and begin to standardize communications and engagement policies and supports in 2024. Having additional resources to work with contractors to intentionally set new goals and practices for engaging EJ communities would be beneficial. The agency also has a limited budget for producing communications and outreach materials, and for conducting DEI-EJ training within the agency.



## Environmental Justice Mapping Tool Involvement (ORS 182.550 Section 5)

- How is your agency participating in the development of the environmental justice mapping tool?

One of OWRD's Community Engagement Coordinators will be participating on the Environmental Justice Mapping Tool Working Group and will make recommendations to OWRD leadership regarding opportunities for OWRD staff to provide input or engage with the tool as it develops.

## Environmental Justice Council Engagement: 2024

- How would your agency like to engage with the EJC in 2024?

OWRD is eager to engage with the EJC. As mentioned above, it has invested staff resources to more actively engage with the EJC and its many participants. In the meantime, OWRD has already reached out for consultation with the EJC regarding the scoping of Best Practices for water projects, as outlined in HB3293, and is looking forward to engaging with the group in early 2024. OWRD hopes to identify areas of mutual interest that the EJC can provide advice and expertise to OWRD as we continue to mature in our environmental justice work.

## Environmental Justice Council Legislative Citations

- Please share agency impacted legislation from the last legislative session where Environmental Justice Council or Environmental Justice Task Force engagement is cited in the legislation.

There was no OWRD-related legislation in 2023 that directly mentioned engagement with the Environmental Justice Task Force or Environmental Justice Council.

## Meaningful Engagement Legislative Citations

- Please share agency impacted legislation that includes language regarding meaningful engagement.
- How do agencies collaborate when multiple agencies are listed?

[House Bill 3293](#) instructed the named agencies (Oregon Water Resources Department, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Environmental Quality, Oregon Department of Health, Oregon Water Enhancement Board, and Business Oregon) to coordinate and develop Best Practices for community engagement for the development and implementation of water projects the agency funds. Agencies are required to recognize best practices in Oregon Administrative Rules to help guide in community engagement by water project developers. HB3293 also encourages, but does not require, the six agencies to make financial support available to local organizations and local governments to create community engagement plans related to water projects. The six named agencies started coordinating on the development of the Best Practices in spring 2023 and intend to engage others externally before finalizing the Best Practices in 2024.

[HB 2010](#) created the Place-Based Water Planning Fund and provides OWRD permanent authority to support place-based integrated water resources planning (place-based water planning). OWRD piloted this approach with four places across the state since 2016. Place-based planning is a collaborative and inclusive process that is designed to: (A) Gather information to develop a shared understanding of water resources and identify critical issues and knowledge gaps; (B) Examine the existing and future in-stream and out-of-stream water needs for people, the economy and the environment; (C) Identify and prioritize strategic, integrated solutions to understand and meet instream and out-of-stream water needs; and (D) Develop, implement and update a place-based integrated water resources plan.

The bill notes that place-based integrated water resources plans are to be "developed using an open, equitable and transparent process that fosters public participation and meaningful engagement with environmental justice communities, consistent with the requirements of ORS 182.545." The established fund allows OWRD to provide grants to groups to do the pre-work to prepare for planning, to develop place-based plans, and to coordinate implementation of state-recognized plans. In addition to those three general categories of grants the bill specifically notes that OWRD may provide financial assistance to facilitate "associated public participation, including participation by members of environmental justice communities, through education, outreach, financial support and other activities." A one-time deposit of \$2M was put into the fund. OWRD is undertaking rulemaking and program development in the 2023-2025 biennium.

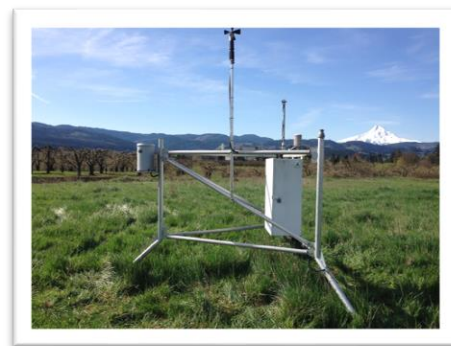
HB 2010 specifically calls out that the Water Resources Commission may establish requirements for promoting public participation and engaging environmental justice communities in its rules. In terms of inter-agency coordination, prior to funding award OWRD is required to consult with the

Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Land Conservation and Development, Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, State Department of Agriculture and State Department of Fish and Wildlife to understand agency capacity, provide assistance and engage in planning.

[HB 2010](#) also made change to the provisions related to the Integrated Water Resources Strategy, including extending the requirement to review and update the IWRS from five years to at least eight years. The bill also requires biennial workplan development for water-related activities and requires the IWRS to include provisions to promote meaningful engagement with environmental justice communities and to promote partnerships with tribes, state and federal bodies to implement recommended actions. There are several other agencies who implement the IWRS, as well as the update. The legislature established a permanent IWRS Specialist position to implement the IWRS, develop updates, and coordinate among state, federal, and local agencies, and educational and non-governmental organizations.

[HB2018](#) was enacted in 2021 to work internally and with external partners through 2032 to develop and publish ground water budgets for all major hydrologic basins in Oregon. This includes multiple layers of data related to ground water levels, recharge and consumptive use. The legislation also directs OWRD to engage communities. Community engagement staff hired in 2023 are now working with multiple sections across OWRD to develop meaningful community outreach that will be coordinated with other OWRD outreach and engagement activities that can benefit from water budget information, such as place-based planning, the Surface Water Availability Reporting System Update, and the Oregon Water Data portal. This is an opportunity to develop meaningful public engagement strategies that broaden public awareness and participation regarding the latest water science and planning for a sustainable water future.

[HB 5506](#) provided \$100k one-time general funds to Portland State University's Oregon Consensus to continue facilitation of the Tribal/State Water Task Force to discuss issues related to water supply, watershed management, water distribution, and tribal water rights. The Task Force started meeting in September 2021 and released its [Summary Report](#) in February 2023. As the Task Force has focused on education and ensuring that all parties have a greater understanding of the importance of water and the future needs of water, it became clear that there are a number of shared values about water that are agreed upon between both the Tribes and the state. This included recognizing the importance of Tribal engagement in water planning in Oregon at all levels. The [Summary Report](#) also identified key themes and recommendations which promote meaningful engagement.



*A new Agri-Met station in Pine Grove, OR provides partners and the interested public with robust ongoing weather data to aid water planning decisions.*

## Definitions

### Environmental Justice: (ORS 182.535 Section 3)

“Environmental justice” means the equal protection from environmental and health risks, fair treatment and meaningful involvement in decision making of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, immigration status, income or other identities with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies that affect the environment in which people live, work, learn and practice spirituality and culture.

### Environmental Justice Community: (ORS 182.535 Section 4)

“Environmental justice community” includes communities of color, communities experiencing lower incomes, communities experiencing health inequities, tribal communities, rural communities, remote communities, coastal communities, communities with limited infrastructure and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including seniors, youth and persons with disabilities.

### Meaningful Involvement: (ORS 182.535 Section 7)

“Meaningful involvement” means:

- (a) Members of vulnerable populations have appropriate opportunities to participate in decisions about a proposed activity that will affect their environment or health;
- (b) Public involvement can influence a decision maker’s decision;
- (c) The concerns of all participants involved are considered in the decision-making process; and
- (d) Decision makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of members of vulnerable populations

### Environmental Burdens: (ORS 182.535 Section 2)

“Environmental burden” means the environmental and health risks to communities caused by the combined historic, current and projected future effects of:

- (a) Exposure to conventional pollution and toxic hazards in the air or in or on water or land;
- (b) Adverse environmental conditions caused or made worse by other contamination or pollution; and
- (c) Changes in the environment resulting from climate change, such as water insecurity, drought, flooding, wildfire, smoke and other air pollution, extreme heat, loss of traditional cultural resources or foods, ocean acidification, sea-level rise and increases in infectious disease.

### Community Engagement Plan (ORS 541.551(a))

For the purposes of implementing ORS 541.551, means a plan to meaningfully engage and provide suitable access to decision-making processes for disproportionately impacted communities,

underrepresented communities, tribal communities and all persons regardless of race, color, national origin or income in planning for water projects using identified best practices.

### Disproportionately Impacted Communities (ORS 541.551(b))

For the purposes of implementing ORS 541.551, “Disproportionately impacted communities” may include:

(A) Rural communities;

(B) Coastal communities;

(C) Areas with above-average concentrations of historically disadvantaged households or residents with low levels of educational attainment, areas with high unemployment, high linguistic isolation, low levels of homeownership or high rent burden or sensitive populations;  
or

(D) Other communities that face barriers to meaningful participation in public processes.