

Water Policy – Quality and Quantity

League of Women Voters of Oregon

Adopted April 2011; Replaced positions on Water Policy and Planning (adopted January 1977; revised March 1985) and Water Quality (adopted January 1969)

The League of Women Voters of Oregon believes that water is a resource that should be managed for the benefit of the public and as sustainable habitat for all life forms. The League supports Oregon state policies and statutes that promote comprehensive long-range planning for conservation and management of ground and surface water and the improvement of water quality. Regulating agencies that govern the protection and conservation of water should be transparent and provide the public easy access to information.

The League supports management approaches that maximize interagency communication to include but are not limited to:

1. Uniform definitions of “beneficial uses” and other terminology for both quality and quantity management,
2. Coordination of activities including water allocation, measurement, monitoring/ testing, enforcement of water law and the promotion of water conservation,
3. Well-defined statutory enforcement procedures and the funding to protect water resources held in common, and
4. Recognition of the variability of local/basin/watershed quality and quantity needs.

The League recognizes the application of historic prior appropriations of water but supports modifications in order to accomplish the following:

1. Consider both in-stream and out-of-stream beneficial uses of water,
2. Facilitate changes from one beneficial use of water to another,
3. Provide incentives for water user conservation,
4. Incorporate evolving scientific understanding of natural water systems in waste management,
5. Develop priority uses for water in times of shortage, and
6. Expand protection of in-stream beneficial uses such as minimum perennial stream flow.

The League believes that the interdependence of land use planning and water planning must be recognized and required at all levels of government:

1. Local comprehensive plans, watershed plans, basin plans, state and regional plans should be coordinated and complementary.
2. Roles and responsibilities of all decision makers and agencies affecting water resource and quality issues should be clearly defined.

The League believes that all planning for ground and surface water should include consideration for both the quality of the water and the availability of water to meet the beneficial uses.

Planning at all levels should consider existing water rights and current and projected uses. The League acknowledges that this may be best accomplished at the watershed/basin level if adequate funding and professional staffing are available. Basin/ watershed water management should be efficient and economical, responsive to public need, flexible to allow for changes over time, and lead to conservation and allocation of the resource in the public interest. Transfers of water between basins should require coordination with planning and water use in both basins.

The League recognizes that effective planning for water protection and use is most effective with a complete inventory of the water resource including all domestic wells and encourages moving toward this goal. Priority efforts should be directed to geographic areas with identified problems and vulnerabilities.

The League opposes degradation of all of Oregon's surface and ground water. The League supports policies and legislation that integrate water quality into resource management and include but are not limited to standards for:

1. Potable water and drinking water treatment facilities,
2. Placement and inspection of septic tanks and alternative individual treatment systems,
3. In-stream surface water quality for recreational use, including primary contact sports, commercial and sport fishing, and habitat protection,
4. Ground water quality for recognized beneficial uses,
5. Agricultural, municipal, forestry and industrial wastewater discharge and runoff,
6. Uniform water quality testing protocols— updated as scientific methodologies improve,
7. Permitting and enforcement procedures with agency funding adequate to ensure timely compliance,
8. Adequate, well maintained sewers and sewage treatment facilities and
9. Control and treatment of runoff from non-pervious surfaces.

The League recognizes that conservation strategies for surface and ground water, including but not limited to incentives, regulations and rationing in emergency situations, are needed to meet future demand. Individuals, agriculture, municipalities, forestry and industry should be encouraged to develop practices to reduce water usage and minimize pollution. Support should be provided for upgrading and maintaining the equipment necessary for water conservation. The League supports the need to build resiliency and innovation into water planning in order to address climate change impacts.

Public involvement should be encouraged throughout the water management and planning processes. The processes should be transparent and include educational components.

The League acknowledges that all water users must share in the cost of water management. Rate payers should have primary responsibility for infrastructure maintenance, delivery and conservation. The state should have primary responsibility for planning, research, data collection and public outreach. Permit fees should be a significant contributor to the development of infrastructure.