



Woman Offering Clean Water by Andra Secelean

# OREGON WATER JUSTICE FRAMEWORK: COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES TO ADVANCE WATER JUSTICE

After two years of community conversations, the [Oregon Water Futures Collaborative](#) has published a [new framework for Water Justice in Oregon](#). The framework aims to shape state and local efforts to advance a water justice agenda and address long-standing disparities in water resources by engaging low-income, rural, and communities of color as water actors and community assets. Water injustices are not new, but a comprehensive environmental justice lens has not been broadly applied to Oregon's water challenges, nor has water been a leading campaign issue for many statewide environmental justice coalitions.

This framework is a part of broader efforts to reframe the conversation around water policy to create more effective policy solutions for all of Oregon. It provides policymakers with a roadmap for centering equity as they weigh the state's many water needs, pointing to six community-driven priorities: Indigenous Water Justice Leadership, Renter's Rights, Water Access and Affordability, Natural and Built Infrastructure for Clean Water, Emergency Preparedness, and Community Empowerment.

## SIX COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PRIORITIES

### 1. Indigenous Water Justice Leadership:

To start addressing systemic injustices, the State of Oregon needs to center Tribal leadership in all decision-making that will impact the future of water bodies in the state and recognize both shared and distinct interests of each sovereign nation.

2. **Renter's Rights:** Renters need access to water bills, water quality reports, and bill-pay assistance. In addition, there needs to be clear remediation pathways if contamination is found, especially for those living in mobile park homes or are on domestic wells. Finally, we need to reduce barriers to growing food at home and in community gardens to advance food sovereignty.

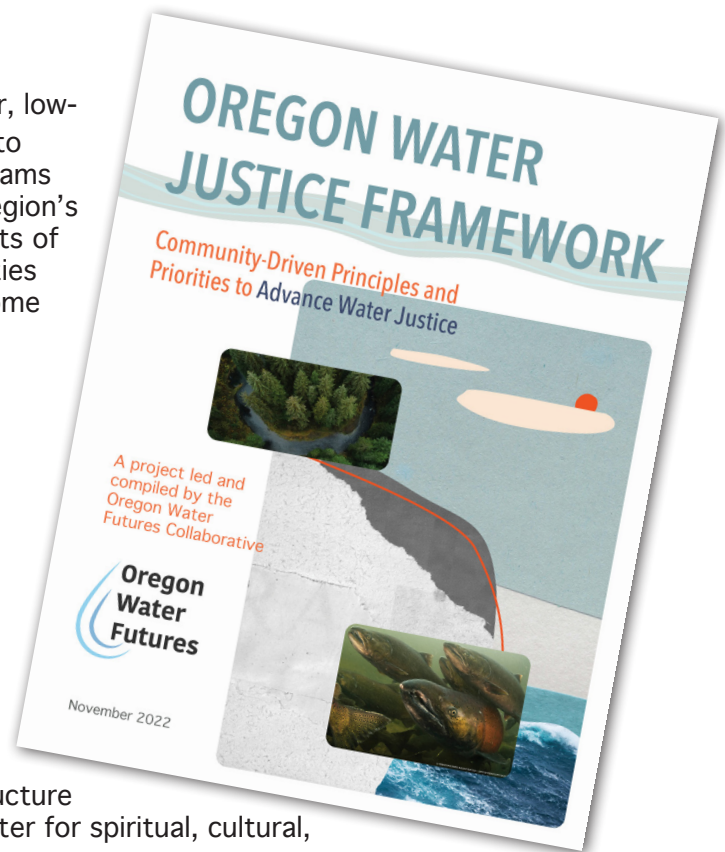
WATER JUSTICE ACTION AGENDA AT A GLANCE



3. **Water Access & Affordability:** Communities of color, low-income communities, and rural residents need access to clean and affordable water. Utility bill assistance programs should be based on the household's income and the region's cost of living and made available to residents in all parts of the state. In addition to making water affordable, utilities should eliminate domestic water shut-offs for low-income households. By taking holistic approaches to water affordability, we can ensure that all Oregonians have access to clean and affordable water.

4. **Natural and Built Infrastructure for Clean Water:**

Discriminatory practices embedded in past water infrastructure programs and the decline of federal funding for water infrastructure development drive water injustices today. Oregon can address these inequities by declaring access to clean water and sanitation a public health emergency. Long-lasting solutions must include consistent and institutionalized investments in natural infrastructure and developing alternatives to centralized systems that are not affordable or practical in remote areas. Water infrastructure investments must also clean and protect bodies of water for spiritual, cultural, and recreational practices.



5. **Emergency Preparedness:** Community members raised concerns about emergency notifications and resources during emergency events. Emergency communication and resources are intertwined with water justice issues especially seen from community members living on the frontlines of disaster and climate impacts. Knowing that Oregon will continue to face climate challenges in the coming years, we must invest in accessible emergency communications and resources to support those most impacted.

6. **Community Empowerment:** Investing in community capacity is just as critical as investing in infrastructure because it opens pathways for more equitable laws and policies that serve communities. Water policies and infrastructure investments need to include funds for community capacity, local water stewardship, and water policy education that is led by and co-designed with Tribes, community-based organizations, Black, Indigenous, and other leaders of color, and low-income and rural communities.

## JOIN US

Water justice requires uplifting priorities, issues, and knowledge from communities that have traditionally been left out of water policy decisions. All Oregonians benefit from a just approach to water management that ensures everyone has access to clean, safe, and affordable water, protection from natural disasters, and restoration of natural landscapes now and for generations to come.

Wherever your realm of influence lies, whether at the state, local, or community level, we encourage you to use the water justice principles and priorities to guide you in your efforts toward water justice for all Oregonians. We will not accomplish water justice in a single legislative session, and it will not be completed by a single group. Rather, it requires an intentional investment in relationships, trust, recognition of history, and centering the leadership of communities experiencing inequities. Oregon's water future will require all of us to work together over time and through conflict. But it'll be worth it – only together can we build a vision for water that doesn't leave anyone behind and allows our communities to thrive for the next 100 years and beyond.