

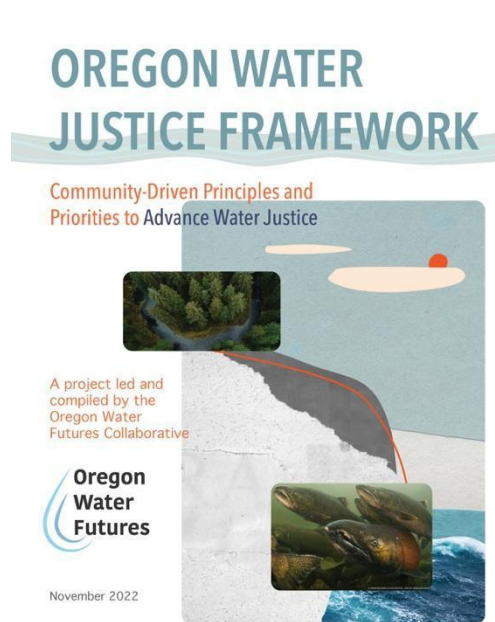


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## **A Historic Moment to Fund Water Infrastructure Gives Oregon the Opportunity to Shape Efforts for Water Justice**

March 27, 2023 (Portland, OR) - With a massive state budget surplus, and billions of federal dollars flowing into Oregon, the state has a historic opportunity to update aging and inadequate water systems at a time when the Western United States is seeing record-breaking flooding and drought that underscores the importance of just and resilient infrastructure.



A new [framework](#) from the [Oregon Water Futures Collaborative](#) 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.

The framework is already impacting water policy in the 2023 legislative session, for example, in the development of historic investments in the [Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package](#). The package, which aims to chart a sustainable water future for families, farms, and fish, includes water justice priorities such as Indigenous water justice leadership, water access and affordability, infrastructure for clean water emergency preparedness, and community empowerment.

More than [2 million Americans](#) live without basic access to safe drinking water and sanitation. [African-American and Latinx households are nearly twice as likely to lack complete plumbing than white households, and Native American households are 19 times more likely.](#)

Water injustices are partly due to a long history of inequitable distribution of water investments. New research shows [smaller municipalities and those with larger populations of color](#) were less likely to receive Clean Water State Revolving Fund assistance, an important mechanism for funding water infrastructure. Without reforms to existing funding systems, new investments will only widen the water and sanitation gap and exacerbate inequality.

Oregon now has a historic opportunity to address water inequities. In the next decade, Oregon will receive an unprecedented amount of federal funding for infrastructure improvements: [over \\$5 billion total and \\$529 million specifically for water infrastructure](#) to modernize its aging water system. This influx of resources has the potential to provide clean, sufficient, and affordable water for communities that need it most, but only if Oregon invests in new and innovative approaches. **The [Oregon Water Justice Framework](#) proposes to be one tool to understand community-driven water priorities and help steer future water investments to communities who need it most.**

The framework builds on the experience of over 200 community members and feedback from tribal governments, researchers, state agencies, utilities, and environmental organizations. It is a part of broader efforts to reframe the conversation around water policy to create more effective policy solutions for all of Oregon. The framework 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.*

The framework represents a crucial shift towards inclusive and equitable water policy in Oregon. By prioritizing the perspectives, concerns, and insights of communities that have historically been excluded from decision-making processes, it seeks to promote a just and sustainable approach to water management. The ultimate goal is to ensure that every person in Oregon has access to clean, safe, and affordable water, protection from the impacts of natural disasters, and the restoration of our natural landscapes for generations to come. It's a bold vision, but one that has the potential to transform the way we think about and care for our most precious resource: water.

*"As a partner of the Oregon Water Futures team, Verde has incorporated community stories into actionable steps that can be taken by the State of Oregon to advance water justice. These steps include fixing and replacing failing septic systems and wells for low-income families to ensure everyone has access to clean drinking water, as well as promoting stronger community engagement, and investing in Indigenous leadership. We call on the Oregon Legislature to use their power to invest in these measures in the Drought Relief and Water Security Package during this legislative session, without any further delays." - Cheyenne Holliday, Verde*

*"As a state, we must prioritize long-term health, safety, and accessibility of water, especially for communities that have experienced historic underinvestment. This requires overcoming silos and promoting a coordinated investment strategy. The new water justice framework helps us to*

WATER JUSTICE ACTION AGENDA AT A GLANCE



*think holistically and to more equitably advance community-driven water priorities.” – Representative Ken Helm*

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Through a water justice lens, the Oregon Water Futures project aims to impact how the future of water in Oregon is imagined through storytelling, capacity building, relationship building, policymaking, and community-centered advocacy at the state and local levels. As the U.S. has been confronted with the realities of outdated water infrastructure and increased natural disasters due to climate change, we need to make sure our communities have access to clean, affordable water. By centering community voices in policy and infrastructure discussions, we can ensure that everyone has that basic human right.

The Oregon Water Futures Collaborative and its partners encourage you to follow up on this work. All follow-up interviews can be scheduled through Lynny Brown, [lynny@willamettepartnership.org](mailto:lynny@willamettepartnership.org). You can [download the full framework](#), learn more about [participating organizations](#) and this effort, and read the [summary](#) of this work at [oregonwaterfutures.org](http://oregonwaterfutures.org).

*Photos include the Oregon Water Justice Framework cover and the Water Justice Action Agenda from the Oregon Water Justice Framework.*

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***Coalition of Communities of Color (@colorcoalition):***

*The Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC) addresses the socioeconomic disparities, institutional racism and inequity of services experienced by our families, children and communities; and to organize our communities for collective action resulting in social change to obtain self-determination, wellness, justice and prosperity.*

***Verde (@verde\_nw):***

*Verde serves communities by building environmental wealth through social enterprise, outreach and advocacy.*

***Oregon Environmental Council (@OEOnline):***

*Founded in 1968, OEC is a statewide nonprofit dedicated to advancing equitable, collaborative, and innovative solutions to Oregon’s environmental challenges for today and future generations.*

***Willamette Partnership (@Willamette\_P):***

*Willamette Partnership is a conservation nonprofit with a deep commitment to helping build stronger, healthier, and more equitable communities that are sustained through nature.*

***University of Oregon Pacific Northwest Just Futures Institute for Racial and Climate Justice (<https://jfi.uoregon.edu>):***

*The Just Futures Institute imagines just futures that value climate and racial justice narratives in the U.S. Pacific Northwest.*

**University of Oregon Environmental and Natural Resources Law Center**  
**(<https://law.uoregon.edu/academics/centers/enr>):**

*The Environmental and Natural Resources Law Center is a leader in public interest environmental law and environmental-legal education. The faculty-led and student-supported Oceans, Coasts, and Watersheds Project—one of seven thematic research initiatives—works with community partners to promote environmental justice and abundant water futures for all.*