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Oregon Water Futures Briefing

May 24, 2021

Nicole:

Thank you so much for joining us today. I'm really excited to be hosting this conversation about the Oregon Water Futures report. We're joined today by Alai Santos, who is the author, as well as three leaders who were involved in helping to facilitate the community conversations that the report summarizes. These aren't all of the partners that were involved, but Alai is going to give a great overview of the themes that emerged in her conversations with Latinx, Indigenous, Black, and migrant communities across the state, over the course of 2020. For the flow for this hour, we're going to hear from Alai and then from our three other guests. That'll take about 25 to 30 minutes and we'll reserve the second half of the hour for Q and A.

Nicole:

Please just use the chat to share your questions. We're going to prioritize questions from journalists and lawmakers during that half hour, but there will be opportunities. We're going to take all the questions and Emily Irish from Willamette Partnership can do some follow-up if there are outstanding questions.

Nicole:

Thank you, Emily.

Nicole:

There will also be opportunities for follow-up conversations. So with that, I will introduce Alai Reyes-Santos. Who is, oh my gosh, Alai. I just, I know you've just sent me your new title and I have hardly lost it, but I will let her introduce me because she just shared a new title. Please take it away.

Alai:

[inaudible 00:01:54] Thank you, Nicole so much for hosting us. Let me get my PowerPoint started.

Alai:

Hello everyone. Thank you so much for being with us today. I'm Alai Reyes-Santos. I'm a Professor of Indigenous Race and Ethnic Studies at University of Oregon. I'm also the Associate Director of the Just Futures Institute for Climate and Racial Justice at University of Oregon.

Alai:

Today I speak from Eugene, Oregon, in Kalapuya Illihi, the ancestral home of the Kalapuya peoples about the Oregon Water Futures Project. I asked permission from Ara, the land, Omi, the waters and Egun, the ancestors, to speak to you today. I ask that each one of us recognizes the Indigenous stewards of the waters, whatever we find ourselves, and this ancestral histories of all peoples displaced by slavery, indentureship, and migration that come to call Oregon Home. May our conversation open roads for water justice for all.

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Alaí:

The Oregon Water Futures Project is a water justice collaborative, that aims to impact how the future of water in Oregon is imagined to storytelling capacity building, relationship building, policymaking and community center advocacy at the state and local level. We centered their voices of communities underrepresented or historically discriminated against in water policy decision making, particularly Native people of color, migrant to low income communities. I want to make sure... I see that is my sharing [inaudible 00:03:28] by any reason?

Alaí:

Are we good?

Nicole:

We're still looking at the cover side.

Alaí:

Oh, okay. Give me one second. Let me stop the share and begin again. I saw some comments on the side and I wondered. Okay. One second. I just, I think when I changed my previous settings. We fix this right now.

Alaí:

My apologies. I had to close the file. Somehow, PowerPoint decides to crash right now. So give me one second.

Nicole:

While Alaí is relaunching on a share, I'll preview who are three other speakers. We have Rachel Lynne Cushman, Councilwoman with Chinook Indian Nation. We have Reyna Lopez, Executive Director of Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, Dolores Martinez who's the Community Engagement Director of Euvalcree.

Alaí:

Great. Now I think it's mine. Here we go. Thank you so much for that, Nicole.

Alaí:

Okay, here we go. Here we go. Can we see the second slide? Yes. Perfect. Thank you. All right. I'll begin again from this slide.

Alaí:

The Oregon Water Futures Project is a water justice collaborative that aims to impact how the future of water in Oregon is imagined through storytelling, capacity building, relationship building, policymaking, and community advocacy at the state and local level. We centered the voices of communities underrepresented or historically discriminated against in water policy decision making, particularly Native, people of color, migrant, and low income communities.

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Alaí:

As you can imagine, we've been quite busy over the past year, putting this all together. The coordination team in 2021 includes University of Oregon, Oregon Environmental Council, Coalition of Communities of Color, Willamette Partnership, and Verde. Our partners are Chinook Indian Nation, PCUN, Euvalcree, Unite Oregon, and NAACP Eugene-Springfield.

Alaí:

In Fall 2020, we undertook interviews and online community gatherings, over the phone and zoom with people in Clatsop, Marion, Polk, Clackamas, Umatilla, Malheur, Lane, and Multnomah Counties. Our report was statewide and county specific findings can be found at Oregon Water Futures dot org. Today I share themes raised by community members in our conversations. Some of these can be addressed by our current legislative session and state and federal allocations for water.

Alaí:

The first thing which I think is one of the most relevant ones that came up in our discussions and conversations with people is that low income, rural, Native, BIPOC, and migrant communities are water experts with the capacity to help the state address the water challenges it faces in the 21st century. Interviewers shared with us what they know about how to best care for water. Interviewers, who are Native Indigenous, Black and migrant from the Caribbean, Asia, East Africa, the Pacific islands, and the Middle East talked to us about passing culturally specific values and traditional ecological knowledge to their children. They know that water is sacred and a finite resource and must be cared for. Migrant communities wish to learn more about Oregon ecosystems, where their drinking water comes from, if they can trust it and how to best advocate for water resources.

Alaí:

The second thing that was really crucial actually, and very important to other conversations that we had is that there are serious information gaps about water bills, water quality, and emergency preparedness that must be addressed. Migrants in rural areas buy bottled water because they do not trust their tap water. Some people even ration it to save money. Drink less water because they cannot afford to buy more. People across the different counties were terrified during the emergency moments like the Salem Algae Bloom crisis and the wildfire season last year.

Alaí:

They lacked information on resources to care for the families or evacuate if needed. If [inaudible 00:07:59] means that community space, serious water, accessibility, quality, and affordability challenges. Including tap water that tastes badly, or it makes them sick. Farm workers without enough water in bathrooms to wash their hands in their fields, renters without proper information about water, quality and cost, and people cannot pay their water bill. I want to highlight here that renters in particular appear to be very vulnerable around water quality costs and information and emergency preparedness throughout all counties that we survey.

Alaí:

Another theme that emerged as well is the need to invest in water, natural infrastructures to support physical, cultural, spiritual health of Oregon's Native communities, as well as other communities of

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color, who, for example, fish in Eastern Oregon to feed their families who engage in ceremonial practices and sacred practices in watersheds as well. We must address how dams, pollution trash, habitat loss, and overharvesting impacts water ecosystems. I think what's really quite relevant right now in the current budget allocations in our legislative session is the question of domestic wells. How the domestic wells and faulty septic systems pose public health challenges and are very expensive to repair. This is a topic that immersed in our rural areas and actually some of the areas around the Portland region as well.

Alaí:

The last thing that I want to highlight today has to do with small water systems, such as those used by some mobile home parks and employer provided housing. We found that in some of the small water systems, inconsistent access to potable drinking water is a reality in people's everyday life. Right now, we can address some of this community needs and public health challenges by investing in the following areas. We're currently educating legislators and state agencies about these. Number one, we must invest in building capacity among culturally specific organizations to participate in water advocacy. This must include both federally and yet to be federally recognized tribes and urban Native communities.

Alaí:

Number two, we must engage Native, Indigenous Latinx, Black, migrant, and other communities of color's leadership in the design and facilitation of community engagement, our own water. This is a priority. Who is the best person to reach out to these communities are these communities' leaders themselves.

Alaí:

Three, we must fund household well testing, treatment and replacement, as well as septic system repairs or replacements so that we can better guarantee the quality of water that people drink and have access at home.

Alaí:

Number four, we must update emergency notification systems to meet non-English speaking, low-income, tribal, and rural residents so that people don't have to feel that kind of fear they felt over the past few years with recent emergencies.

Alaí:

Number five, we must ensure that fire recovery funds reach very small water systems, which often fall through the cracks and produce issues, especially in places like mobile home parks.

Alaí:

Lastly, we must make sure that low income, rural communities of color are intentionally engaged in all these investment areas. If that intention is not clear, we risk once again, having information, funding and programs that continue to be inaccessible to these communities and continue to foster water justice disparities in the state today.

Alaí:

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Thank you so much for being with us today and I look forward to answering questions about the work we have completed and the work that we have ahead of us in the next few years.

Nicole:

Thank you so much, Alai.

Nicole:

Again, please hold your questions for Alai. Will take all the questions together at the end.

Nicole:

Next, we're going to hear from Rachel Lynne Cushman, Councilwoman with the Chinook Indian Nation.

Rachel:

Hi, I'm Rachel Cushman [non-English language 00:12:13].

Rachel:

My name is Rachel Cushman. I am a Councilwoman of the Chinook Indian Nation, the five Western most Chinook-speaking tribes at the mouth of the Columbia. I listed them in my introduction. My people are the Clatsop and] Kathlamet of the state of Oregon. The Wahkiakum, Willapa, and Lower Chinook of what is the state of Washington. We were one nation straddling the Columbia river. I'm a direct descendant of Clatsop Chief Wasilta also known by his pen name, Washington. My grandfather was one of two negotiators and signers for the Clatsop tribe of Chinook's at the Anson Dart treaties at Tansy Point, Oregon in 1851. I'm proud of that fact.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:13:04]

Rachel:

And in my community, that is something of a responsibility. It has been an honor to be included in the Oregon Waters Future Project. The Chinook Indian Nation is often left out of important conversations like this because of our federal status. Federal Indian policy is complicated and the treatment of Indigenous people by government agencies or government entities is often convoluted, tumultuous, and unjust, or as the courts often find it, arbitrary and capricious.

Rachel:

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the nine recognized tribes of Oregon. It's important to acknowledge the Indigenous peoples whose lands and waters you're on. The nine tribes are extremely important, but they're not the only tribes of Oregon. Folks like to think that the United States' relationship with Indian country is stagnant, but it's not. Not that long ago, there were no federally recognized tribes or federally acknowledged tribes in western Oregon. People forget that. Some people don't even know that history. They don't know the history of Oregon.

Rachel:

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The 1950s was the termination era where it was attempted to erase and eradicate various tribes. Restoration bills reinstated many of Oregon's tribes, but not all of them. The Chinook Indian Nation has been fighting for nearly 170 years to honor the treaties at Tansy Point and provide justice for the Chinook Indian Nation. We continue to push for federal acknowledgement. This report isn't about federal acknowledgement, but we have all the issues of Indian Country with limited means of resolving those issues, and the Oregon Water Futures Report sheds light on many of the water issues that Chinook Indian Nation struggles with, including, but not limited to, access to clean, safe water, waste management and/or mismanagement, emergency preparedness, ecological and natural resource preservation, but most importantly, autonomy over and access to our Aboriginal territory.

Rachel:

There can be no water justice if important players are left out of the conversations. The Chinook Indian Nation has worked with several of Oregon's departments over the years in official government to government capacities. However, consultations are not always prioritized by the state. Engagement with the Chinook Nation, Black, Indigenous, communities of color needs to be prioritized. The Oregon Water Futures report outlines many ways in which the state can successfully prioritize these communities. Currently, there are several bills before the state legislature that are supported by the findings of this report.

Rachel:

Black, Indigenous, and people of color are always the first to experience the effects of water mismanagement and therefore, our water's future, and that's what this report allows. Thank you for this opportunity, mahsie]. If you'd like more information about the Chinook Indian nation, you can visit chinooknation.org. Mahsie.

Nicole:

Thank you, Rachel. Next, we'll hear from Reyna Lopez, who is executive director of PCUN.

Reyna:

Thank you, and thank you everyone for having me here today. I'm Reyna Lopez. I'm the Executive Director of PCUN, Oregon's farmworker union based in the heart of Oregon's Latinx community in Woodburn, Oregon. And a little bit about me. I'm a proud daughter of immigrant farm workers who came following the migration of work north starting in the strawberry fields in California and eventually ending up in Salem, Oregon, where we followed the migration of the Christmas tree industry and where Oregon is known worldwide for its famous Christmas trees. And my family was one of those folks that followed it.

Reyna:

PCUN itself, for me, it all comes full circle. My own family was part of the membership of PCUN Pineros y Campesino, part of the union. And today, our base continues to be farm workers, Latinx working families, and folks who work in frontline jobs and essential workers.

Reyna:

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And for me, this story around water security, water justice is a farm worker issue. Farm workers are on the front lines of the crisis, whether that's climate, whether that's the pandemic, whether it's the future of our water, because farm workers are the group of people that ensure that Oregon and the United States' table is fed.

Reyna:

And for me, one of the things that I really wanted to make sure and highlight throughout the report, especially around these intersections when we're talking about climate and water and how that affects our everyday lives, how does that affect our systems, how does that affect communities, how does that affect our food systems? I was one of the people that brought up the 2018 algae bloom and for my family and for my community, what that meant was that they were the last people to receive some of the most vital information about the contamination in the drinking water in 2018.

Reyna:

And there were several reasons for that. One, there was language barriers. Two, there was not an infrastructure of emergency systems that were informing people about key issues that were going on with our water at that time. And not only that, but we also saw that it was really unfortunate that there was also people getting taken advantage of in these moments of crisis where we were seeing drinking water that was at stores, the prices getting pumped up three times in communities that were Latinx or immigrant majority communities in the Salem-Kaiser area. And so for me, that right there is a perfect example of why this conversation is so important to Latinx communities, to farm workers, to essential workers all across the state.

Reyna:

The other thing that I think is really important is this other intersection that we have been ... This is a bread and butter issue for PCUN, frankly. It's particularly around the exposure to pesticides and herbicides and other toxic chemicals in the workplace and at home. And there have been report after report that we've seen, especially in the Polk County area, where water resources have been found with traces of pesticides and herbicides, some of the most toxic pesticides and herbicides that are being used in our food systems today.

Reyna:

And the conversation around that really led us to ask more questions of our community. What are your values around water? What do you understand about the water systems in the United States, whether you're the first generation, the second generation, children to teenagers around what people's understandings were around water? And I think that it was pretty clear through the conversations that water is a very, very important, deep-seated, rooted thing that is valued in the Latinx community, especially with our Indigenous Mexican and Guatemalan communities. A lot of people don't know this, but a majority of farm workers identify as Indigenous communities of Mexico and central America. And we were seeing that there was even different tactics and different rituals that people had around water conservation that were really, really beautiful and it was a really important way of bringing these conversations to the fold.

Reyna:

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Another thing that I think was really important to highlight throughout the pandemic is just that there is a lot of mistrust right now in immigrant communities, Latinx communities, especially around where our water's coming from, people not knowing where it comes from, or even just remembering what happened during the algae bloom and saying, "Well, this is something that we didn't really know very much. We didn't get the information about and our communities weren't informed about."

Reyna:

And then the other thing that I would say too is, especially throughout the pandemic and especially thinking about climate change, what it meant for communities, farm worker communities, to be out at work every single day at the height of the pandemic and not having access to clean water to be able to just simply wash their hands, and what was the number one thing that we were being told in the middle of the pandemic that would save lives? It was not just the face covering, but it was wash your hands. And many farm workers were calling us saying, "Hey, there's not a water station for miles from here, so how am I supposed to wash my hands?" And those were conversations that were starting to come up as we were really asking the question around water and the different interactions we have in our lives about it.

Reyna:

But in addition to that, also just seeing the changes in climate throughout the last decade, throughout the last two decades, where farm workers who have been out there for many years are saying, "The days are getting hotter and we need access to drinkable water when we're working," and that's also not something that is in abundance when we're out in the blueberry or out in the hazelnut or out in the Christmas tree, and that is the lens that we're really using to make this conversation a lot more real because I think that just saying Oregon's water future it sounds like such a big thing, but using these very, very specific examples to be able to elevate people's voices is crucial in making it real for people.

Reyna:

And also, one thing I would say is in addition to thinking about how we close the gap, how we interact with making sure that communities have access to emergency supports when they need it, in the language they need it, with navigation services and making sure that we make anything that maybe was a barrier in the past for them to getting this information a total non-barrier. And that's where Alaí's section around community-based organization partnerships is crucial.

Reyna:

And we saw this throughout the entire last year, through the COVID-19 emergency response and wildfires where we had to pivot our programs completely into making sure that we were a hub for information in people's languages, whether that was in Spanish or in some of the top spoken Indigenous languages. We don't have all of them at PCUN. I wish we did, but at the very bare minimum, we were able to do Mixteco. And while we really needed more Mam folks, which is an Indigenous language from Guatemala, we did have volunteers that were able to do some of that support work.

Reyna:

I mean, I think that another thing that was really important out of the report was also, again, that role that renters are uniquely vulnerable to the challenges of water and affordability, and that's because a

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lot of people don't have that key information to know exactly where the source is, who to go to, what the information is, in addition to people just generally wanting to know more about how to participate.

Reyna:

I think that I've heard in the past many agencies, and even today, many agencies come to PCUN and say, "How do we get Latinx folks to engage with us?" And I mean, really it's about creating that space. And I would say this is the same for anybody, creating a safe space, a place where people are comfortable, where people can bring their life experiences and it's welcomed and where it's taken as something that is valuable, information that is key in making sure that we're really making any kind of policy changes that take into account people's lived experiences. And again, I just want to highlight three very important things that I think came out of many of the conversations that we were having with our community and making sure that we're working with CBOs that are culturally specific to be able to amplify this information ...

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:26:04]

Reyna:

CBOs that are culturally specific to be able to amplify this information, amplify it quickly and ensuring that they have resources to do it because I heard a very wise mentor of mine once say, "If this isn't a line item in your budget, it's not a priority." So, I think that we need to remember that. If this isn't a line item budget, it's not a priority. Let's make it a priority, let's make sure that we're also investing in infrastructure especially around water emergencies because we can't lie to ourselves about this, we can't not face this anymore. These emergencies are coming whether we like them or not. More wildfires, more climate shifts and us not having real emergency responses in place to be able to collectively care for our community, is not going to be helpful in what we're about to face in the next few years and beyond. So, thank you so much for your time today. Very excited to see everybody here and would love to answer questions when it's time.

Nicole:

Thank you Reyna. And lastly, we are going to hear from Dolores Martinez, who is community engagement director at Euvalcree.

Dolores Martinez:

Thank you Nicole. Hi everyone, good afternoon. My name is Dolores Martinez. I'm the Director of Community Engagement with Euvalcree here in Eastern Oregon. I'm from Vale, Oregon, a rural area here in Malheur County. Euvalcree is a community lead nonprofit organization serving in Eastern Oregon Counties to develop the social, capital, and leadership capacity of community members. According with the census data 34.6% of people residing in Malheur County and 27.6% of people in Umatilla County identified Hispanic or Latino.

Dolores Martinez:

Today I'm here to share a few experiences and findings of the interviews made for the Oregon Water Futures Project. I'll be sharing some quotes from the complete interview. One says, "I share with my

children what I went through in my childhood. I taught them to be aware of water usage and why they shouldn't play with it." That comes from Rosario.

Dolores Martinez:

And, "I teach my children about being careful whenever they drink water because I live in an apartment and sometimes they give maintenance to the pipes and the water will come very dirty, and I had to make sure they don't drink water like that. The water is not good because sometimes you don't have money to... You aren't really sure. One time, I wasn't really sure and I'm like, 'I'm not going to drink water so I'm just going to buy this filter and try to use it,' but it didn't work. So I just ended up drinking tap water and after that I ended up getting sick and I'm not going to bother with my hopes for the water so I just go buy water but then I end up to not drinking enough water because I'm not wanting to spend more money on it."

Dolores Martinez:

Those stories come from some of the participants on the interviews and some of the finding test results of this interviews is that the experience of severe water scarcity in Mexico and Guatemala shapes water perspectives today. So the majority of the participants immigrated to the United States from Mexico or Guatemala and many didn't have portable running water in their country of origin. They already learned how to source and clean water before using it to drink, cook. And some people still use this practice at home in Oregon because of lack of trust, drinking water resources.

Dolores Martinez:

Participants noted that they weren't as bad others and stains, sinks, and tubes smell like mud and makes them sick. Some farmworkers do not trust in water from agriculture well. Malheur County has water quality challenges in [inaudible 00:30:36] and [inaudible 00:30:38] in-ground water. Both Malheur and Umatilla Counties have the high radius of drinking water violations. Interviews express there is strong desire to know more about the safety of the water in homes and the expense and [inaudible 00:30:55] your water costs these participants between \$20 and \$100 per month. How do you imagine this scenario during this pandemic? As Reyna mentioned, "It's hard to get water on this time and farm workers are working in the high temperature without access to water, clean water."

Dolores Martinez:

Concern exists about water affordability and lack of access to information. Several participants noted that they struggle to pay their bills. Renters didn't know the actual utility cost for the residents and don't receive annual drinking water quality reports. We wonder how water infrastructure improvements may impact housing costs through the region, where housing access and cost is really a concern.

Dolores Martinez:

Challenge with the water. Participants reported water scarcity challenges in homes and farm worker's housing in Oregon. One person reported one neighborhood in Ontario where wells frequently run dry and another person shared in the farm worker's housing where they live, water is delivered infrequent in winter and everyone has to [inaudible 00:32:14] more. Water quality and access raise questions about sanitation. Interviews with the community participants elevate their concerns about the water staining bathroom fixtures at home. This caused people to wonder about their water and worry about the

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impact of the harsh chemical cleaners they use at home to deal with water stains that look like calcium build up, mold or have a pink or yellow hue.

Dolores Martinez:

In conclusion, as a result of these interviews, it shows the needs and the disparities in the community to feel safe, educate about where the waters come from, to exercise their human right, to be a better quality of life, having access to good quality water that is affordable and accessible to all. Thank you for being with us today and I'm happy to answer any questions. Thank you so much.

Nicole:

Thank you Dolores. And now we will invite questions through the chat please, and I know we have a phone participant so I will unmute you and please go ahead and ask a question if you have one, otherwise we can circle back to you later. We have a question, it looks like for you Alai. Someone asking you to touch on the methods, total numbers of interviews, etcetera, from this report.

Alai:

Yes, thank you for asking that Katie. So I can tell you that we interviewed 104 people across the eight counties. We had some interviews that were part of a community gathering with Chinook Indian Nation over Zoom. We also had a community gathering with Unite Oregon in Clackamas County and that particular community gathering we actually had interpretations simultaneously in Spanish, Burmese and Nepali as well. So in terms of methodology, we were trying to make sure that every time we met with people, we were speaking in the language in which they feel more comfortable speaking with us about water.

Alai:

And the rest were individual interviews, around half hour interviews, with individuals in the rest of the counties. We did most of them between August and then through October and beginning of November. I would say that at least three fourths of the interviews that we did in Marion, Polk, Umatilla and Malheur County were in Spanish so, that's really relevant as well. That's how we undertook those interviews as well.

Alai:

And in terms of methodology, I'll say this and go back to something that Reyna brought up around community partnerships. Something that was really important to us was to not have only, let's say 20 questions that were the same ones that we ask everyone as if communities have the same needs across the state or the same language to speak of water. So we made sure that every time we developed a questionnaire or we co-facilitated. For example, Rachel and I co-facilitated the conversation with Chinook Indian Nation, Jairaj Singh and I co-facilitated the conversation with Unite Oregon.

Alai:

I did most of the one-on-one interviews. Dolores did some of those interviews however as well, in Umatilla and Malheur. So, we made sure that we were co-designing the questions, co-designing how we were reaching out to people and also co-facilitating as needed as well to make sure that we were using language that spoke to people, in ways of talking about water that spoke to people.

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Alaí:

And last thing I'll say about this, and I'll keep saying this everywhere I go right now is, I have had the luck, I'm privileged to have three academic degrees, to learn about many things through higher education. When one enters water infrastructure, law and policy spaces, the language that is used is often inaccessible, right? It inaccessible to me. Of course, quite a lot of training to even be part of those conversations and when we talk with people and bring that kind of language, people say, "Well, I don't know anything about water," but if we just ask people, "How did you grow up with water? How do you feel about water?" People have a lot to say and a lot to share, right?

Alaí:

There were many interviews, people say, "Wow, I do know a lot about water." And it was really amazing to realize how alienating the language that is used oftentimes to try to have these conversations, is for most people, including myself to be very honest with you, without everybody who's here, we can have more, the kind of stories that people shared like Rachel, Dolores, Reyna and other people share, right? Storytelling is a beautiful way for people to share their expertise about water, what they know about water quality in their communities, what they know about how they love and care for water and how they pass that knowledge to their children. And overall state agencies and other utility companies and policy makers could learn a lot from those kinds of stories. So I feel like as a methodology, that was pretty central for us. I hope that answers your question.

Nicole:

So, I have a question from Bobby Cochran asking what do you see as actions the Oregon legislature and the governor can take to show they're listening to the community voices who've shared in this report?

Alaí:

Thank you Bobby for that question. I actually, I was ready for that question so I have some notes here. So, so far, the Oregon Water Futures Project has been sharing a letter of potential early actions that the state can take to do that thing that Reyna said about putting prioritizing in budget, putting the money in those places where, if we're going to say we're going to prioritize these communities and conversations about water, are we going to fund the areas that meet the needs of these communities, and are we going to actually allocate resources that allow those communities to advocate for themselves and build capacity among themselves to advocate in those decision-making spaces?

Alaí:

So for example, we've been talking about SB 5545, which is appropriating money from the General Fund to Water Resources Department. That's one of the bills in which we're having conversations with people. House Bill 3293, which is to authorize different kinds of local community engagements for water projects, HB 2251, which would direct Water Resources Department to provide staff support, to engage some agency priorities in priority water basins, HB 2145, which would establish a water well abandonment repair and replacement fund, so addressing the question of well repair and replacements that are still needed in so many different places. And I want to keep talking about well water because it was beautiful to talk with people, especially-

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Alaí:

Because it was beautiful to talk with people, especially migrants from different communities, to talk about "I grew up drinking well water. I knew how to clean it, I knew it was safe for me. This well water is not good for me. It makes my family sick." So it's not a question of bias towards well water. It's that people know what's in that water. And people could sometimes tell me, "I know that there's this toxin in my water. Therefore, my family doesn't drink it."

Alaí:

So well water being a really important area of investment, as well as septic system repairs as well. HB3090 is actually engaging the question of on-site septic systems by providing low interest loans to cover particular kinds of costs to address issues with septic systems as well. We are also talking with people about funding from the American Rescue Plan Act and how that could be allocated for this capacity building that's led by BIPOC communities around water justice in the state.

Alaí:

We know that there's conversations about a water act in the Oregon congressional delegation right now. And we've been having conversations and sharing this information as well with those offices and hoping that they will engage it in the ways in which federal and state budget allocations truly show that they prioritize the findings and stories that people have shared here today.

Nicole:

Thank you, Alaí. While we're waiting for other questions, is there anything the other speakers or Emily Irish who helped to facilitate this project, want to share that was sparked by hearing the other speakers?

Rachel:

I'll say something. This is Rachel Cushman again. Actually, participating in this report has already started enacting change. Recently within our territory, we have been, Chinook Indian Nation, has been asked to participate on various watershed boards and have been invited to have seats at certain local decision-making entities because of talking about this project and our involvement in this project. And they're like, "Well, you should be at this table." The invites are now being extended because of this report. So I just want to say that there's things that can happen with these Senate bills and whatnot, but there are things on local levels that are already changing because of this report.

Nicole:

Thanks for that, Rachel. And we have a question from Monica [Samoyoa 00:42:08], sorry, I don't know how to pronounce your last name, asking if anyone had already asked what the next steps are, what government agencies are looking into this? Alaí did share a bit about work that she's been doing, but would welcome you to talk more about next steps.

Alaí:

Yeah. I'll share a few things and please, anybody else who wants to share from their part of the work that they're doing as well, feel free to do so as well. In terms of the Oregon Water Futures Collaborative, we are currently growing a water justice network in the state that we're hoping will continue to sustain a process of consultation with both... We're planning to go back to the community members that we

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interviewed and share, this is what we found in the community, but also what other communities said, and try to build some connections and relationships within communities that may not know that they share the same concerns about well water or septic issues or water affordability.

Alaí:

So we're going to go back, share this information with the people we interviewed. And we also will be sharing this information with communities we didn't get to consult. And so that is, we're currently applying for funding to be able to do that, to provide the resources and other pieces of our methodologies that we believe. That to do this work, we should provide the resources for staff time and public relations outreach, that CBOs need to be able to participate in this work. So we're doing that right now. We're fundraising. We're going to be talking with people we already talked to before, but summarizing all these findings and seeing what else comes up for them, as well.

Alaí:

And also, we're trying to build relationships within different communities throughout the state, to build this network of people invested in water justice. We're also talking to people we haven't talked to before, or we've talked informally, but now we want to give feedback, now that we have all these findings put in one report, in one place.

Alaí:

We are trying to put forth a water justice leadership institute that will be to build more capacity in frontline communities to advocate around water. And we're hoping to, from all that consultation process and that capacity building, to be able to put forth more policy recommendations in the 2023 legislative session as well. And in that way, fortify the possibility of water justice coalitions, movements, and solidarities across the state with multiple communities.

Alaí:

And oh yeah. One more thing. We have good news as well from the University of Oregon. We got funding to fund a digital platform to feature traditional ecological knowledge by communities of color as a way to also highlight and elevate the expertise that all the communities that we've talked to in this project, and other communities as well, hold around ecological knowledge in this state and elevate it and provide us an educational resource as well.

Alaí:

And I want to open the floor, in case my colleagues want to share anything else from their end of things as well.

Nicole:

Leaving a little more silence in case someone wants to jump in. We'll welcome questions now from anyone on the phone or Zoom. If you have additional questions, please feel free to share them in the chat. Again, by way of next steps, the full report will be available at 10:00 AM tomorrow, along with a press release. We'll be having this Zoom conversation transcribed, and we'll make that available. And then Emily Irish at Willamette Partnership can facilitate connections with the speakers for follow-up conversations.

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Alaí:

I just saw the second part of Monica's question about government agencies, and I didn't want to... If they're here, I don't want them to feel like I did not mention them. We have definitely been in conversations with the Department of Natural Resources, and we've been presenting at the Racial Justice Council's Environmental Equity Committee for the past year, and engaging in policy recommendations in that space as well. That has been convened by the governor's office too, so I just wanted to highlight those two pieces. And we're also in conversations with the people working on the Oregon Water Vision, which was something that began two years ago, the pandemic defunded it, and now there's some momentum to bring funding to Oregon Water Vision project that engages communities. And of course, we're trying to center these communities in those conversations, as well as people who design, who lead and facilitate this process as well.

Nicole:

Great. [crosstalk 00:47:23].

Reyna:

One more thing I'll add too is that the Oregon Health Authority had a really great report that talked about climate and also different aspects of how it's affecting from a public health perspective. And also had a section in the report that they did this past year on drought and water quality, so we're seeing it from different angles. And also, I think that having that public health perspective too really helps, especially around the work that we've been doing, because a lot of the stories that we're hearing about is directly connected to the health aspects of it and how it's affecting people's bodies and more the visceral and the coughing and the nausea, those things are the things that we get to hear about. So it's really good to see that perspective as well.

Nicole:

Thanks for that Reyna. We don't have to hold you all, all the way for the hour, if there are no further questions. More information to come tomorrow, very appreciative of all of our panelists for sharing this incredible work, and looking forward to sharing the full report tomorrow. Thank you all.

Alaí:

Thank you, Nicole. Thank you, everyone. It's good to see you. Thank you for being with us.

Speaker 2:

Thank you, take care.

Nicole:

Bye.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [00:49:01]