

Federal agency to study water priorities for Willamette Basin

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

PORTLAND — The U.S. Geological Survey is embarking on a study to better understand water supply and demand in the Willamette Basin.

The study is part of a larger effort by the agency to assess water availability and infrastructure nationwide in response to climate change, population growth and other challenges.

To identify gaps in water availability, the agency is undertaking a series of 10 Integrated Water Science studies in basins across the country, meeting with stakeholders and monitoring interactions among climate, human consumption and hydrology.

The Willamette Basin was selected as the fourth study area, following the Delaware, Upper Colorado and Illinois river basins.

Tanya Trujillo, the U.S. Department of the Interior's assistant secretary for water and science, said in a statement the Willamette Basin supports major cities, fertile agriculture and ecologically important species such as salmon, "making it an ideal location to develop better science for future decisions that will affect both the environment and people of the region."

Nestled between the Oregon Coast and Cascade mountain ranges, the Willamette Valley spans 150

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miles north to south and 60 miles east to west. It is home to two-thirds of the state's population, including the Portland metro area, and \$2.3 billion worth of agricultural production.

The basin was chosen "because its hydrologic and environmental setting is representative of the challenges faced by conflicting water

demands between humans and ecosystems — particularly salmon — throughout the entire Pacific Northwest," according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

Integrated Water Science studies date back to the 2009 SECURE Water Act, which directed the agency to establish a national water availability assessment.

The agency uses "regionally focused innovative data collection, research and modeling" to provide real-time data on water quality, quantity and usage. From there, scientists can develop an Integrated Water Availability Assessment predicting the amount of surface water and groundwater available to balance each basin's needs.

Don Cline, the associate director for water at the U.S. Geological Survey, said water monitoring, research and modeling will help the Willamette Basin come up with innovative solutions to issues that are common across many Northwest river systems.

"For example, we expect it to bolster our scientific understanding of seasonal variation in precipitation, groundwater-surface water interactions, snowpack influence on summer low flows, watershed response to severe fire and harmful algal bloom prediction," Cline said.

The agency said it will begin meeting with partners in the basin later this spring.

Masks: Public Health Department urges people to respect individual choices

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On Wednesday, the Astoria School District Board met to take public comments from families and make a determination on mask policies.

During a work session before the meeting, Superintendent Craig Hoppes, who said he spoke to at-risk staff and many concerned parents, made a recommendation to the school board to make indoor masking voluntary and to pause contact tracing.

The school board voted unanimously at the meeting to approve Hoppes' recommendation, making indoor masking optional for students and staff.

The school board decided to wait until April 4 — a week after spring break — to allow volunteers and visitors to return to schools.

Hoppes also gave a presentation to the school board and families that described survey results on indoor masking.

The survey found that 60% of school staff, 70.7%

of students and 74% of parents favored making masks optional indoors.

"No matter what the decision is tonight, whether it's masks on or masks off ... we still have to continue with some mitigation strategies," Hoppes said. "It doesn't go away because masks potentially could go away or contact tracing could go away."

Hoppes said the school district will continue to monitor for virus symptoms and implement social distancing, high quality airflow and sanitation efforts. He added that the district will keep an eye on absences and document outbreaks, but not to the extent that administrators did before.

School districts in Warrenton, Seaside and Knappa have also elected to make masking optional for students and staff. Administrators in Jewell will discuss the school district's plan at Monday's board meeting.

"This potentially could be a big change for us in what we've done," Hoppes said.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Masks are now optional at schools in Clatsop County.

"We don't know what tomorrow brings. We're hoping that what the forecast says is accurate. But we've learned over the last couple years to be real flexible with this."

The Clatsop County Public Health Department said it would continue to work closely with schools.

"Earlier in the pandemic, we committed that our community's children would be able to safely return to school ready to learn," Margo Lalich, the county's interim public health director, said in a statement. "That time has come and we continue working closely with school communities to ensure children and teachers are in a safe environment."

While the indoor mask mandate has expired — except in health care settings

and other places where the risk is especially high — the Public Health Department urged people to respect individual choices.

The county said some people may choose to continue to wear masks for health reasons, because they are caregivers or because they may not be eligible for vaccination. Businesses can also choose to require masks for customers. The county is offering free "Masks are Welcome" signs via the county's website.

"We realize and respect that our community has diverse needs and that a healthy and safe environment may mean different things to different people," Lalich said. "We encourage people to continue to be respectful of individual choices."

Open houses: The building would wrap around a courtyard

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workers earning 60% to 80% of the area median income. That means, to be eligible, most workers would need to earn around \$14.74 to \$19.65 an hour, or \$30,660 to \$40,880 annually, using 2021 figures.

The other 33 units would be reserved for supportive housing for clients of Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare priced at 30% of area median income.

The building could include retail space, a possible child care facility and a community room on the ground floor along Duane Street. A covered terrace would sit next to the Garden of Surging Waves.

The building would wrap around a courtyard.

A parking lot with 21 spaces next to the American Legion would be accessible from Exchange.

After finalizing the basic concept, Edlen & Co. will begin conversations about what will be needed from the city to make the project finan-

cially feasible.

In order to apply to the state for government financial help this year, the developer must have "property control," such as an option to purchase or a purchase and sale agreement, by the time of the appli-

cation deadline on April 22.

There would be a pause until August, when Edlen & Co. expects to hear whether the application for government funding has been approved.

If the team secures state

funding this year, it would resume the design process and community engagement.

If the project is approved by the city, construction could begin by the summer of 2023 and could be completed by 2025.

Williams: 'I have an understanding of the college's finances'

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"I care about the college and believe that my experience in public administration and skills could be a benefit to the Board of Education," Williams said in an email. "I have served on the college budget committee for the past six years, so I have an understanding of the college's finances."

Prior to her role at the hospital, Williams worked in Clatsop County in several positions, including assistant county manager. She also served as CEO of Clatsop Care Health District. She is an Astoria High School graduate

with a bachelor's degree from Western Oregon University and a master's degree from American Public University.

Williams said she hopes to see a capital fund dedicated to the maintenance of college-owned facilities, which the board has discussed, become a priority for the college this year.

Teaford-Cantor served on the board for seven years. The board did not publicly disclose the reason for her resignation, but Rosemary Baker-Monaghan, the board's chairwoman, indicated that her inability to attend meetings played a role.

Water: City has applied for a \$13M loan from Business Oregon to help complete the final phase

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"This is taking big strides in us being prepared to be able to get people water, help them survive and get the town back on its feet."

The first part of the project, which began in 2019, includes the installation of seismic valves on each of the city's three water tanks. When an earthquake strikes, the valves will be able to sense the movement and automatically shut off the tanks to prevent the loss of drinking water.

The city received a \$586,000 low-interest loan from Business Oregon for the first phase. The loan is offered at a 1% interest rate and a 50% forgivable balance.

The third phase of the project includes running a flexible water pipe along U.S. Highway 101. La Bonte said the concrete and

asbestos pipe that currently runs through town will likely fail during an earthquake, so the new line will create redundancy.

The city has two metal water tanks and one that is concrete. Phase three will include replacing the concrete tank.

The city has applied for a \$13 million loan from Business Oregon to help complete the final phase.

La Bonte said the low-interest loans have allowed the city to keep utility rate increases from overburdening residents.

Between the public works improvements and the emergency management work — particularly in preparing safety and survival cache sites, La Bonte believes the town will be prepared for disasters.

"I think that this town has come a long way from what we were ever prepared to handle post event," she said.



Pamela Wev wants to Visit with you!

Pam Wev is currently serving as County Commissioner, representing District 3. She is running for re-election and she is asking for your support!

Visit with Pam and discuss the issues you feel are important to our county. As always, she is eager to listen.

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Sunday, March 13, 3-5 PM

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