

GROUNDWATER: If aquifer goes dry, city would rely on Umatilla River

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although it still draws groundwater as a back-up for especially dry years. Since ASR was started in 2003, the city has left an estimated 8 billion gallons of water in the ground.

In 2007, the city won Stewardship and Conservation Award from the Water Resources Commission for its ASR system.

But it isn't enough to stop groundwater declines.

When a production well in Roy Raley Park went down in August, part of the issue was that the pump was having difficulty lowering further down the 700-foot hole. If the pump wasn't allowed to lower from 400 feet down to 440 feet, it was in danger of eventually pumping air.

There's other data that show a decline in groundwater in the Pendleton area. According to the Oregon Water Resources Department, most of the observation wells in the area show a steady decline from about 900 feet average mean above sea

level in the 1950s and 1960s to 800 feet in 2015. In 2016, *The Oregonian* calculated that the Umatilla Basin, which covers Pendleton and most of Umatilla County, is at 148 percent capacity, meaning there was far more usage than replenishment.

The Umatilla Basin is a part of the larger Columbia River Basalt, a geological formation formed from more than 150 layers of cooled lava flow covering Oregon and Washington.

The water that seeped between those layers forms the basis for the basin's groundwater, but because of the region's sparse rainfall and the slow flow of snowmelt from the Blue Mountains, the aquifer recharges slowly.

With Pendleton's ASR system already in place, Patterson said farmers on the west side of the county, where irrigated agriculture is the most prevalent, were the cause of the cross-county decline. Patterson said adoption of ASR or better conservation techniques by farmers could help stem the decline.

Different solution

Everyone who relies on groundwater agrees that the decline needs to be addressed. But how it's done is up for debate.

J.R. Cook, the director of the Northeast Oregon Water Association, said there's no definitive proof that the activities of west county irrigators are affecting Pendleton's groundwater drinking water supply.

He pointed to a 2003 Oregon Water Resources Department study that stated limited connectivity between the city's wells and west side irrigators, but said explicit knowledge of the connection is still unknown.

"Bottom line: we don't know who's connected to who," he said.

As reported by *The Oregonian*, many aquifers like the Umatilla Basin suffer from a dearth of modern information, including the amount of water left in the aquifer and its recharge rate.

NOWA is a nonprofit that advocates diverting water from the Columbia River to Eastern Oregon

farmers, establishing surface water as an agricultural "checking account" while using groundwater as a "savings account."

If NOWA is able to convince the state to approve of its program, Cook said it would take the stress off the aquifer and allow for a more comprehensive study of the area's groundwater.

"Who cares who points the finger at whom?" he said. "We've got a problem."

Cook said it would be difficult to make ASR a financially viable option for westside farmers.

While cities can pass the costs of installing an ASR system to their ratepayers, west county farmers can't raise the price of the carrots, onions or potatoes they sell and expect to compete in a global marketplace.

Cook said these kinds of products and all the associated industries they've benefited are the reason places like Hermiston and the Port of Morrow are experiencing rapid economic growth.

With farmers already on board,

Cook said more support from cities for NOWA's cause would be mutually beneficial.

The future

If the trend isn't reversed and water levels continue to decline, Patterson hopes a complete depletion of Pendleton groundwater wouldn't happen for generations.

If the aquifer goes dry, Patterson said the city would have to rely entirely on the Umatilla River for its drinking water. Instead of drawing the surface water and banking it in below-ground storage areas, it would be transported to above ground containers for immediate use.

Besides the tens of millions of dollars such a system would require in new infrastructure, Patterson said Pendleton would lose water through evaporation at the compound and have to renegotiate water rights with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

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DISASTER: Price tag for hurricane season at \$44B

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supplemental quickly, but it should be just the beginning of Congress' efforts to aid in rebuilding."

Congress last month approved a \$15.3 billion aid package that combined community development block grant rebuilding funds with emergency money for cleanup, repair and housing.

The federal flood insurance program is on track to run out of money to pay claims during the week of Oct. 23. Mulvaney said more than 20,000 federal workers have been deployed by various agencies to help in the hurricane recovery effort. The "burn rate" of almost \$200 million a day is requiring an infusion of cash into FEMA coffers.

The request would bring the price tag for this year's costly hurricane season to about \$44 billion—and that's before rebuilding efforts get under way in earnest. A final estimate is a ways away since damage assessments of Puerto Rico may take some time, but Mulvaney said the administration will submit assessments in time for a hoped-for budget agreement later this year.

The year-end package would rebuild infrastructure, help people without insurance restore their homes, and, perhaps, help Puerto Rico reconstitute its shattered electrical grid.

"The hundreds of thousands of people affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria have suffered enough. Congress must provide whatever is necessary to get these families back on their feet and to rebuild their communities," said House

Appropriations Committee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J. "This will be a long process, and this next round of funds certainly won't be all that is needed."

Congress is in the midst of an effort to reauthorize the flood insurance program, which critics say makes taxpayers subsidize properties that have repeatedly flooded. A bipartisan effort to reform the program was enacted in 2012. It was significantly watered down just two years later after complaints of huge premium increases and resulting disruptions in coastal real estate markets. But there's sure to be bipartisan opposition to Mulvaney's extensive roster of changes to the program, which has strong backing from Republicans in coastal states.

Trump raised eyebrows in a Tuesday interview with Fox News when he said the Puerto Rican government's debt would have to be "wiped out."

"They owe a lot of money to your friends on Wall Street and we're going to have to wipe that out," Trump said.

But on Wednesday, Mulvaney told reporters that "we are not going to be offering a bailout for Puerto Rico or for its current bondholders."

Rep. Luis Guterrez, D-Ill., said the situation there presents more difficult challenges than disasters in the continental U.S. For instance, without power or internet service, victims of Maria can't go online to register for aid. Housing vouchers are largely useless since the entire Island is devastated. He said many thousands of Puerto Ricans will need to be evacuated to the U.S. mainland.

REDISTRRICT: Independent commission would draw lines

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maps are created as bills that need to be signed by the governor to take effect. That last happened in 2011. The legislation was approved with broad support from both Democrats and Republicans in the Legislature, and was signed into law by Gov. John Kitzhaber.

But that's not always been the case in Oregon. Between 1961 and 2011, every redistricting attempt by the Legislature ended in failure. In some cases, lawmakers simply couldn't agree, meaning it fell to the secretary of state to draw the maps. In other cases, lawmakers agreed, but the plan was vetoed by the governor. Other times, legal challenges meant the final decision came at the Oregon Supreme Court.

Richardson's task force recommends that instead of leaving the job to lawmakers, an 11-member independent commission draw up the maps. The commission would include three Democrats, three Republicans, and five people who are either members of other political parties or are unaffiliated. Any plan would have to receive support from at least seven members of the panel, including at least one person

from each of the state's two largest political parties.

A spokesperson for Richardson said the Republican is talking with GOP lawmakers to try to get the concept introduced as a bill in the 2018 legislative session.

Since the commission is recommending the changes take the form of a constitutional amendment, lawmakers would have to refer the proposal to voters, presumably on the November 2018 ballot.

Democrats, who currently control both the Oregon House and Senate, as well as the governor's office, are skeptical of the proposal.

"I don't think the secretary's made the case for it," said Oregon Democratic Party Chair Jeanne Atkins, who previously served as Oregon Secretary of State.

Atkins said the 2011 redistricting effort set a standard and that Oregon doesn't need to follow the likes of California and Washington, which have created independent redistricting commissions similar to the one being proposed by Richardson.

"To jump to the conclusion that we, too, need to change our system just because other states have, I think is an errant jump," Atkins said.



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