

Five-Year Strategic Plan

2023 - 2028



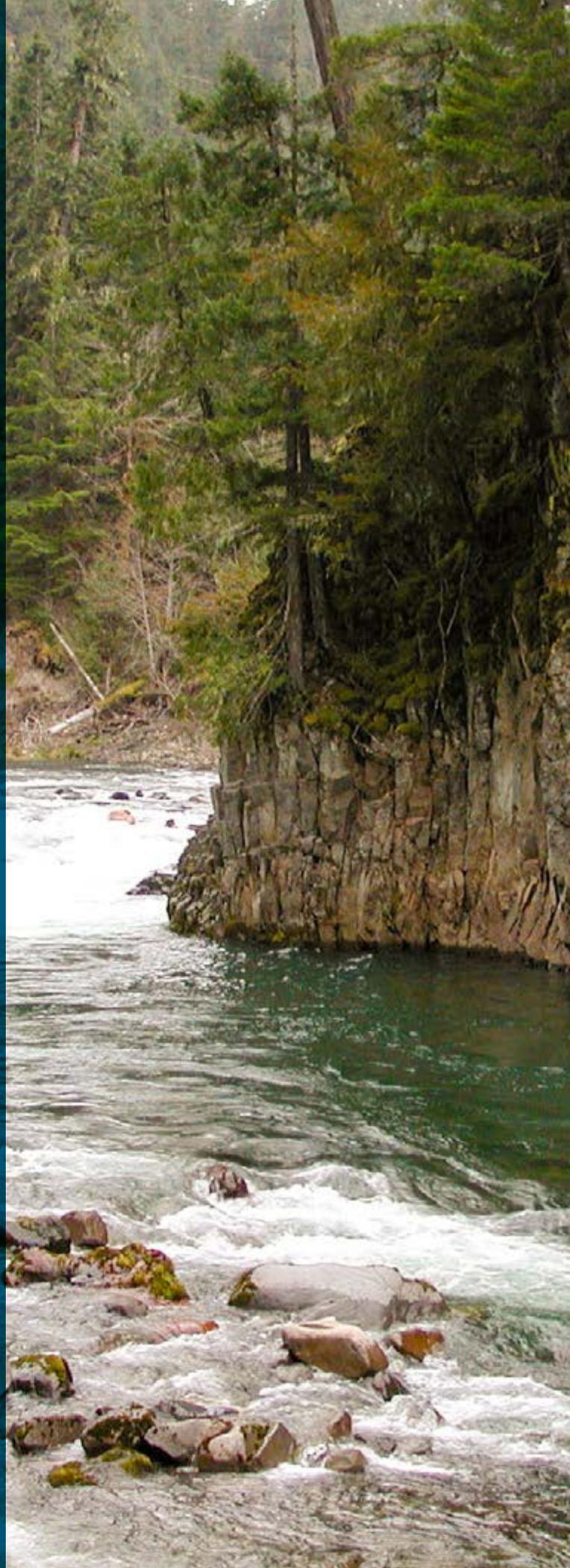
Regional Water Providers Consortium



OUR MISSION

To provide leadership in the planning, management, stewardship, and resiliency of drinking water in the greater Portland, Oregon metropolitan region.

www.regionalH2O.org



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Introduction

The Regional Water Providers Consortium (Consortium) provides leadership in the planning, management, stewardship, and resiliency of municipal water supplies in the greater Portland, Oregon metropolitan region. Established in 1997, the Consortium, with its members, work together in emergency preparedness, water conservation, and regional coordination.



THE LAST FIVE YEARS was a time of incredible change, adversity, and innovation for the Consortium and its members. The Consortium addressed the needs of members and the community as we responded to a global pandemic, extreme weather, wildfires, and supply chain challenges. The Strategic Plan kept the Consortium grounded in its priorities and provided the tools to be flexible and responsive. Of note was multilingual communication about the safety of our drinking water, advancements in emergency drinking water planning, and a focus on equity and accessibility. This strategic plan incorporates the many lessons learned and builds on the Consortium's strengths.

CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

- Beaverton, *City of*
- Clackamas River Water
- Cornelius, *City of*
- Forest Grove, *City of*
- Gladstone, *City of*
- Gresham, *City of*
- Hillsboro, *City of*
- Lake Oswego, *City of*
- Milwaukie, *City of*
- Newberg, *City of*
- Oak Lodge Water Services
- Portland, *City of*
- Raleigh Water District
- Rockwood Water PUD
- Sandy, *City of*
- Scappoose, *City of*
- Sherwood, *City of*
- South Fork Water Board
- Sunrise Water Authority
- Tigard, *City of*
- Troutdale, *City of*
- Tualatin, *City of*
- Tualatin Valley Water District
- West Slope Water District
- Wilsonville, *City of*

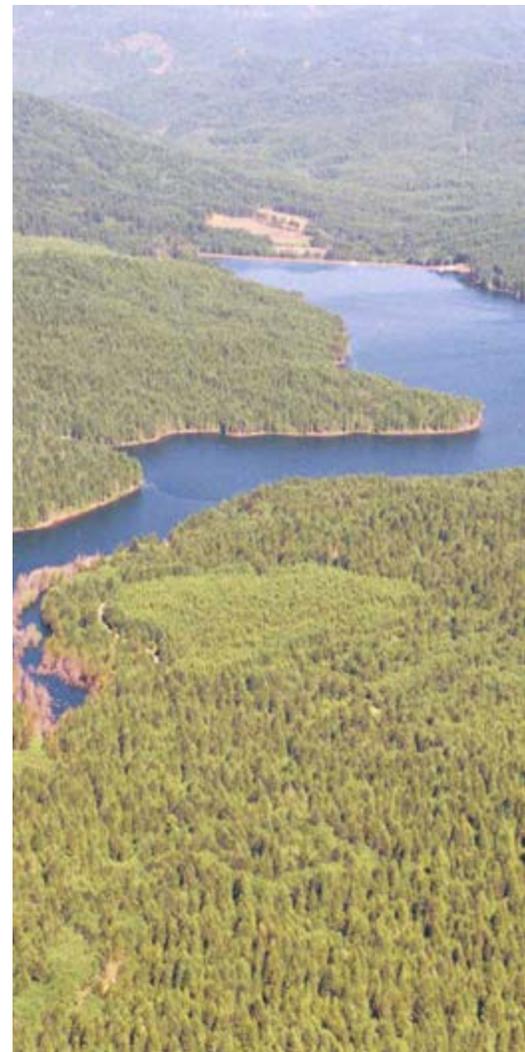


2023 – 2028 Strategic Plan

The 2023 Strategic Plan was developed during a 12-month planning period by the Consortium Board with significant input from the Executive Committee, Consortium Technical Committee, and Consortium staff. The three Consortium working committees provided technical expertise in developing the strategic initiatives and reviewing the plan.

As part of the strategic plan update, members reviewed and affirmed the mission and values, conducted an updated Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis (see Appendix), and refined priorities for the next five years. The Consortium values were updated to include our commitment to equity.

PHOTOS (LEFT TO RIGHT) COURTESY OF
CLACKAMAS RIVER WATER, CITY OF
WILLSONVILLE, AND CITY OF HILLSBORO





The 2023 Plan focuses our work in three major strategic areas:

- Meeting Water Needs
- Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency
- Strengthening Regional Partnerships

The Strategic Plan builds on the Consortium’s strengths of leveraging our collective knowledge and resources to communicate the value of water, being prepared for emergencies, and being good stewards of our water resources.

The Consortium speaks with one voice on issues affecting drinking water supplies, uses economies of scale to cost-effectively complete projects that benefit our members and the community, and fosters strong regional partnerships.

PHOTO COURTESY OF REGIONAL WATER PROVIDERS CONSORTIUM

Consortium Mission and Values



Our Mission

TO PROVIDE LEADERSHIP in the planning, management, stewardship, and resiliency of drinking water in the greater Portland, Oregon metropolitan region.

WE DO THIS BY:

- Providing a member-based network of peers to share knowledge, technical expertise, and resources.
- Promoting stewardship and coordinating regional water conservation programs.
- Making our water systems more resilient and promoting emergency preparedness in collaboration with our emergency management partners.
- Leveraging member resources to achieve economies of scale.
- Being a trusted source for drinking water information.

Our Values

THESE PRINCIPLES guide how we work together and with our partners:

Consensus

We strive for one voice on matters that impact water providers and our customers.

Collaboration

We explore regional options, partnerships, and mutually beneficial solutions while retaining individual decision-making and accountability to our customers.

Respect

We acknowledge our differences and engage in open, honest, and constructive dialogue.

Stewardship

We advocate for wise management of existing and potential sources of drinking water.

Transparency

We share information openly and are available to our members and the communities we serve.

Resiliency

We support each other and collectively prepare to mitigate for, respond to, and recover from emergencies

Equity

We incorporate equity into our planning, budgeting, programming, outreach, and workplace culture.

Serving Our Members and Our Community

The Portland metropolitan area is fortunate to have access to many sources of drinking water that flow freely from our faucets. It is a resource that is easy to take for granted. Water providers work diligently to ensure that their customers have access to safe, reliable water. To do this, water providers build and maintain a complex system of pipes, hydrants, treatment systems, and reservoirs while also planning for aging infrastructure, population changes, new regulations, emergencies, seismic hazards, and climate change. The Consortium's work supports its members to ensure that the region has a long-term, reliable, efficient, and safe water supply.

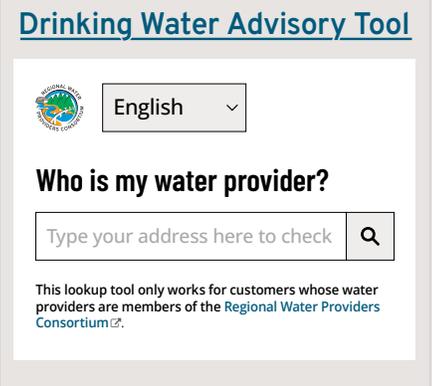


KEY ACTIVITIES that support our region and our members:

- Multimedia and multilingual outreach tools and campaigns on topics of importance to water provider customers and the greater community. Topics include water conservation, emergency preparedness, value of water, and source water protection.
- Consortium water conservation programs help members meet their public education requirements of OAR Division 86 – Water Management and Conservation Plans.
- Partnership with the Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization (RDPO) gives water providers a seat at the table as regional partners collaborate to increase disaster resilience. The RDPO supports the Consortium and water providers in acquiring grants for regional water treatment and distribution equipment, foundational planning studies, and multilingual outreach tools.
- Large-scale drills and tabletop exercises ensure that water provider staff have the training, critical skills, and hands-on experience that is needed to address realistic scenarios affecting the region’s water supplies.
- Consortium members save ratepayer money by pooling resources to complete projects that benefit the entire region. This includes member messaging toolkits, multimedia campaigns, content translation, equipment purchases, studies, and annual print orders.
- Consortium staff are active in the drinking water community, track water-related legislation, information, opportunities, and resources with a variety of local, regional, state, and national groups.
- Consortium provides the forum for members to have access to subject matter experts, sub-regional partnership opportunities, and the relationships to develop and share resources with one another.



PHOTO COURTESY OF REGIONAL WATER PROVIDERS CONSORTIUM



Major Focus Areas

The strategic planning process affirmed the Consortium's three major focus areas. Through the planning process, staff and members developed strategic initiatives for each of the three focus areas and identified projects to support the initiatives. The strategic initiatives will help address major challenges facing the region and leverage emerging opportunities.

- Meeting Water Needs
- Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency
- Strengthening Regional Partnerships



MAJOR FOCUS AREA #1

Meeting Water Needs

THE MEETING WATER NEEDS FOCUS AREA grounds the Consortium in its core work – to meet the water needs of the region through effective management and stewardship of the region’s drinking water. This is achieved in many ways, and how we accomplish this work has evolved over time. Since forming in 1997, the Consortium has been a leader in regional water supply planning. Today, that leadership continues in emergency drinking water planning and regional resiliency. This strategic planning period will provide an opportunity to look at the collective planning work of the Consortium and identify future needs and priorities that are of value to members.

Public outreach and education will continue to be key to the success of managing and ensuring that the region’s water resources are resilient over the next five years. Messaging will focus on the important role individual actions play in being able to collectively use water wisely, preparing for and responding to emergencies, and protecting drinking water sources. To do this, the Consortium will build on its past successes, evolve to meet changing needs, and work together with community partners to leverage resources and increase access to its products and programs.

Strategic Initiatives

- Make best use of available water resources, partnerships, plans, and studies to meet regional water needs and respond to changes in population and water demand.
- Provide programming, public education, and outreach materials on priority topics that are accessible to diverse audiences and stakeholders.
- Provide accessible programs and resources that help water providers meet water conservation requirements.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF BEAVERTON



PHOTO COURTESY OF REGIONAL WATER PROVIDERS CONSORTIUM

MAJOR FOCUS AREA #2

Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency

CONSORTIUM MEMBERS GAINED a tremendous amount of experience responding to emergencies over the last five years. The Consortium provided a forum for communication, collaboration, support, and learning and demonstrated that we are stronger and more resilient when we work together. The events of the past five years also exposed gaps and created opportunities to improve partnerships with state and county emergency management. Through its work, the Consortium has cultivated relationships with key state and regional emergency management staff to raise awareness of water provider needs and our role in emergency response.

This strategic planning period will focus on continuing to build resiliency in the region and planning for emergency drinking water supplies with county and state emergency management partners. With new staff in the region, training, exercises, and drills will continue to be a priority.

Strategic Initiatives

- Facilitate planning, projects, and training opportunities that strengthen members' ability to plan for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and extreme events.
- Obtain and develop resources that will help members and the region support preparedness goals and requirements.
- Support each other through data and resource sharing and mutual aid.
- Collaborate with state and regional stakeholders to improve regional coordination, communication, emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Support and implement recommendations from the 2022 Emergency Drinking Water Framework.

MAJOR FOCUS AREA #3

Strengthening Regional Partnerships

THE CONSORTIUM IS BUILT on partnerships and working together. Not only partnerships with each other but also with water sector and community organizations. The Consortium's strength is in speaking with one voice on issues of mutual interest, being a forum to discuss and tackle common challenges, and achieve economies of scale. That said, there is still work to be done to ensure Consortium members and their elected officials understand the value the organization brings to their respective agencies so that they continue to participate in, benefit from, and support this important work. The Consortium brings together decades of collective knowledge and experience to the region. This collective experience is a valued resource to the greater community in conservation, emergency preparedness, and regional water supply planning.

Strategic Initiatives

- Expand awareness of the Consortium's value, mission, programs, and the benefits of membership to water providers.
- Facilitate a network of peers that members can rely on for information, expertise, resources, and sub-regional partnerships.
- Maintain Board and staff continuity and effectiveness through succession planning, effective onboarding, and member engagement.
- Address issues of importance to Consortium members through legislative advocacy.
- Build strong and strategic relationships that reflect our community and prioritize equity when sharing information about drinking water and Consortium resources.
- Be a trusted source for drinking water related information.

EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY

The Consortium also has a role in the community by making information about drinking water available to diverse audiences by using tools and tactics such as plain language, simplified graphics with alt text, translating content into more languages, providing information in multiple formats, and ensuring regionalH2O.org meets WCAG AA guidelines or better.

Implementation Strategies

The 2023-2028 Strategic Plan will be revisited by the Consortium Board annually as it develops budgets and work plans. As part of the plan development, the Consortium identified a list of work tasks to implement the strategic initiatives over the planning horizon. Work tasks include roles and responsibilities for implementation, time frames, and metrics where applicable.

Each October, the Consortium Board begins preparing the coming year's work plan and budget. At that time the Board will review and evaluate the Consortium's progress on its strategic initiatives to ensure tasks are on track, still relevant, and important to the success of the overall plan. Changes and modifications can be made, if needed.



General Implementation Strategies

1 Managing Director/Board and Consortium Technical Committee (CTC) Chair Check-ins

A strong relationship between the Managing Director, CTC Chair, and Board Chair can provide an effective forum for considering emerging issues and strategies.

By holding regular check-in meetings, the Managing Director, CTC Chair, and Board Chair can assess progress on strategic initiatives.

- These may be held quarterly or as needed.
 - The goal is to provide a sounding board and support for the Managing Director to address issues related to the Strategic Plan implementation.
 - Meetings should end with clear action items to be addressed.
-

2 Strategic Initiative Milestone Reviews

While the Consortium staff, CTC, and Board will annually review progress on the entire strategic plan, it may be helpful to identify small teams of staff and possibly Board members to do a quick assessment on progress of a single strategic initiative.

- Milestone reviews should be held periodically for each of the three major focus areas and provide a forum where a quick assessment of progress can be made. The strategic initiatives are reviewed for key milestones met or milestones in danger of not being met. The problem will not typically be solved in the course of the meeting, but a sub-committee or subset of staff should be identified to examine it more carefully.
- The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis included in this plan will be annually reviewed to determine if there are any new threats or opportunities that need to be addressed.
- Action steps include assignments to determine strategies to address roadblocks encountered and to develop a plan.



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Consortium Board Member Implementation Strategies

The Consortium staff and CTC members are primarily responsible for developing annual work plans and strategic plan implementation. However, as an intergovernmental organization, the Board also takes seriously its role in ensuring that the Consortium meets its mission. As such, Board members have identified a number of important steps that they can take to contribute to the overall success of the plan.

Board members are willing and available to:

- Advocate at the legislative level on issues related to water resources, conservation, and emergency preparedness.
- Provide opportunities for the sharing of technical information between staff and Board.
- Share resources with respective boards, councils, local partners, and customers.
- Reach out to newly elected or appointed representatives as they join or attend Consortium meetings and events to assist with onboarding and ensuring effective service.
- Serve as ambassadors for the Consortium for other water providers, staff and elected officials.
- Support workforce development in the water industry to attract new people into the field.

The implementation strategies above will be supported by regular check-ins at Board meetings. This will provide Board members time to report on activities and identify upcoming opportunities. Consortium staff will also help identify suitable occasions for Board engagement.

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Appendix



Updated SWOT Analysis

The Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis offered an opportunity to update the areas of greatest concern for the Consortium, and leverage some of the key strengths and opportunities. These brainstorming sessions with the Board and the CTC were used to provide context for the strategic initiatives developed for each of the main focus areas.

Strengths and weaknesses are typically internally focused and highlight the factors that influence the organization from within.

STRENGTHS

- Established and effective programs
- Expertise of Consortium and member staff
- Support each other and share information
- Relationship-building and participation
- Effectiveness of Consortium staff
- Consortium provides a place for partners and stakeholders to reach us in one place (one-stop-shop)
- Provides space to share priorities and perspectives across jurisdictional boundaries
- Ability to leverage funds and use resources efficiently
- Ability to bring information from other groups (e.g. RDPO, OWUC) back to members so not everyone has to participate/attend more meetings
- Agreement among members to work together
- Improved level of preparedness
- Flexibility to respond to emerging issues
- Training and exercises to improve emergency preparedness and response

WEAKNESSES

- Reliance on seasoned staff – both Consortium and member staff – without good succession planning in place
- Lack of profile and awareness of organization within member organizations, especially larger utilities
- Not all regional water providers are members: cost and staffing are barriers
- Lack of Consortium and member staff capacity as we continue to take on more projects/initiatives
- Not being prepared for unanticipated emergencies (e.g. chlorine shortage)
- Lack of identity as organization that is not a direct service provider
- Changes in population and potential in-migration from drought-stricken regions
- Taking on projects or work tasks that may be outside our strategic plan and initiatives
- Lack of regional water transmission capacity and interoperability
- Old messaging/strategy on conservation

Following an analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses, the group shifted its focus to externally-focused factors that may offer new possibilities or present challenges to the success of the Consortium.

OPPORTUNITIES

Partnerships and making connections with other sectors and disciplines

Completion of Emergency Drinking Water Framework

Create efficiencies to respond to regulatory requirements such as America’s Water Infrastructure Act (AWIA) and Lead and Copper (LCR) rule

Potential to acquire grants as regional organization for members

Coordinated efforts related to climate change and climate adaptation

Development of ready-to-use talking points

Provide a regional voice and perspective on water-related topics and relevant legislation

THREATS

Impacts from climate change (e.g. vulnerable populations, increase in waterborne disease, duration of extreme events)

Lack of trained and available workforce, labor retention

Affordability of drinking water and how to balance planning for risks (e.g. Cascadia earthquake) versus keeping water affordable

Emerging contaminants: threat to water quality, public confidence, and increasing regulations

Supply chain challenges, contractor availability, and higher costs (materials and human resources)

Competing member priorities (funding, staffing, and projects)

Fiscal risk: inflation, funding shortages, competition for funding

Lack of public support of investment in drinking water infrastructure

Public not “hearing” our messaging through media campaigns

Lack of public understanding about the importance of drinking water as being critical to public safety (e.g. firefighting)

Aging infrastructure and colliding timelines for replacement cycles

Over- or underinvestment in projects due to lack of regional discussions and planning

Consortium Committees



CONSORTIUM STAFF

Managing Director

Rebecca Geisen

Management Assistant

Patty Burk

Program Manager

Bonny Cushman

Program Specialist

Riley Berger



1120 SW 5th Avenue, Suite 405, Portland, Oregon 97204
503-823-7528 www.regionalH2O.org

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