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Oregon Water Partnership applauds 2025 Legislature's continued investments in core water programs

Progress on key legislation lays groundwork for water champions to collaborate on solutions to 21st-century challenges in the 2026 session

June 30, 2025, Salem, OREGON – As hotter summers, warmer winters, and more than a century of overallocation continue to strain Oregon's water supplies, leaders in the Legislature increased general funds for water resources management during the 2025 legislative session, which ended Sunday.

"[Oregon Water Partnership](#) was heartened to see the Legislature recognize the importance of maintaining momentum on water, and state funding for critical agency programs is strong evidence that lawmakers are ready to take action," said **James Fraser, Oregon policy director at Trout Unlimited**. "While we are disappointed that two important water bills stalled out, we are encouraged by the meaningful conversations that they generated and look forward to continuing our work with lawmakers to advance pragmatic solutions."

"Where the Legislature chooses to invest in lean budget years speaks volumes," said **Kimberley Priestley, senior policy analyst at WaterWatch of Oregon**. "This year's continued investment in water ensures that work to modernize water management and protect instream flows and aquifers will continue its forward momentum—this is good news for our streams, wildlife, and communities."

Oregon Water Partnership would like to thank **Gov. Tina Kotek** for making modernization of water laws a [top priority](#) this session. The Partnership is also grateful for the Senate's elevated attention to Oregon's worsening water issues, and applauds **Sens. Kathleen Taylor, Floyd Prozanski, and Jeff Golden** for their outspoken support of legislation designed to address one of Oregon's most outdated water laws: water transfers.

Oregon's finite water supplies are strained to the point of being unable to support new extractions in much of the state, resulting in the increased use of water transfers—a process for changing water rights so they can be extracted from a new location, or used in different places or for a new purpose—to meet new water development needs. But the transfer process has a loophole that allows these changes to bypass the environmental standards that apply to new water right applications, exposing rivers and the people and wildlife that rely on them to harm from diminished flows.

Throughout the 2025 session, Oregon Water Partnership elevated awareness of the transfer loophole by introducing and advocating for SB 427, which would require applications to be

screened for potential environmental harm before water rights are transferred. A February hearing on the Partnership's bill kicked off months of discussion and was followed by the Governor's introduction of SB 1153, for which Oregon Water Partnership testified in support as another valid approach to solving the same problem.

"This is my office's attempt to have a very important conversation about how we modernize and update our water rights transfer policies," said **Gov. Tina Kotek** during a [March roundtable discussion with reporters](#). "We know that how we manage our limited resource of water will be very important in the decades ahead."

Hearings and conversations on the loophole issue culminated in negotiated amendments to respond to concerns raised by extractive water users. Though neither bill reached the Senate Floor, they generated close to 700 letters of support and helped build a valuable foundation for more collaboration and progress in the next legislative session.

"The prevailing laws for transferring water rights are over 100 years old, and the stress on our limited water supplies has greatly increased since then," said **Sen. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland, chair of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire**. "To pass a healthy state along to our kids and theirs, many of us are determined to build on this session's foundation and pass a strong bill in the session to come."

"This is a fixable problem that we ignore at our peril," said **Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, co-chair of the Joint Water Caucus**. "Conversations this session have made clear that workable solutions exist."

"Oregonians are counting on us to ensure our laws are protective of our water, and I am confident the transfer loophole can be addressed in ways that balance resource protection with water flexibility," said **Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, chief sponsor of SB 427**.

Looking ahead to the 2026 "short session," Oregon Water Partnership supports policies and investments that will improve the health and resiliency of Oregon's water resources and the fish, families, and farms they support. Priorities for the 2026 session include:

- Advancing policies that protect and restore Oregon's cold, clean water
- Defending against further depletion of rivers and groundwater aquifers
- Building support for critical investments in water data, science, and technology
- Increasing the resilience of our natural water supplies to droughts, fires, and floods

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Oregon Water Partnership represents seven statewide conservation groups that work together to ensure abundant, cold, clean water to sustain our communities, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Our members: Environmental Defense Fund, Oregon Environmental Council, Sustainable Northwest, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, WaterWater of Oregon, and Wild Salmon Center. More at www.oregonwaterpartnership.org.