



## Answers to Oregon Water Resources Department Integrated Water Resources Strategy Survey

The Oregon Water Resources Department, in partnership with the Department of Environmental Quality and their stakeholders, is in the beginning stages of developing a long-term integrated water resources strategy for the State of Oregon. They requested responses from the public to these seven questions to help them design a process.

*Submitted February 18, 2009 by the League of Women Voters of Oregon, Marge Easley, President*

1. *Describe the organization you represent and its interest in an Integrated Water Resources Strategy for Oregon.*

The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a grassroots nonpartisan, political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The LWVOR has long been interested in Oregon water issues. We have positions related to water policy and planning and water quality, most important of which is "...all water policy should be managed for the benefit of the public."

Our membership believes water issues are so important that they approved a new study of water issues in 2007. We have spent the last 18 months learning about Oregon's water laws and any federal laws that connect with this issue. The report was released in February. A second part of the study scheduled for completion in 2010, will look in depth at current water issues. Local Leagues will be reviewing what was learned, reviewing our current positions and determining if changes should be made. Perhaps the biggest and most obvious issue identified to date in the LWVOR study is that there are a myriad of agencies, statutes and rules governing water quality and quantity, yet each agency addresses their individual responsibility without a comprehensive state strategy in place.

The League is pleased to see the development of an Integrated Water Resource Strategy for Oregon and is interested in participating and working to provide informed public participation.

2. *We are seeking the widest possible input on this strategy from all interested parties throughout the State. How do you think we can best do this?*

LWVOR recognizes Oregon has a vast network of water related organizations that should be involved in gathering input. However, the general public, not directly

involved in or familiar with water related issues, needs to be incorporated in the outreach. Using platforms such as the LWV, Granges, information in utility bills, municipality publications, sporting clubs, Rotary, and other public service organizations will bring in members of the general public who might not otherwise be aware of the urgency and complexity of the issue. Computer tools such as PowerPoint, websites, and e-mail links that are readily available would make this process easier. Important in this process is presenting an interesting story that involves the general public by providing an appropriate level of excitement and challenge.

- 3. Are there particular approaches that you have used or seen in planning processes that we should use as well? (e.g., use of a SWOT strength-weakness-opportunities-threats assessment, or other specific process). Which, in your view, are processes that work well and which are not?*

Recognizing that stakeholders may enter this process with preconceived biases and impressions, care must be taken to use processes that will not initially alienate participants and will encourage acceptance of compromise and change. Since most approaches vary in their effectiveness depending on the characteristics of the planning group, identifying or recommending approaches is difficult.

The LWVOR would suggest that the process might be best assisted by utilizing the talents and experience of existing organizations such as Sea Grant, Extension and the Council of Governments that have a recognized track record providing non-biased facilitation of plan development and the technical expertise to ensure “translation” of data and issues to maximize task force understanding.

- 4. How formal should this process be, in terms of advisory or technical groups?*

The process will vary. If the issue involves policy development, the more debate allowed the better. For technical groups which are less advocacy and more informational, presentations and responses will likely be different. The “formality” of groups must not inhibit public participation and should be as interactive as is possible. No resolution of conflict is ever solved with a top-down approach.

Good scientific data will require the development of a strong technical science advisory group. This group will, by nature, be organized and must be extremely knowledgeable. Such a group may require a peer review process.

Because the process requires the integration of federal and state laws, statutes and regulations, an advisory group with knowledge and understanding of the legal implications of both state and federal laws will be essential. The legal advisory group must have the capacity to integrate successfully with the scientific advisory group

These formal technical and advisory groups will provide accurate support to be integrated in to a less formal process of feedback from the diverse stakeholder groups.

5. *What do you think about piggybacking this process onto already existing events, activities, or opportunities? For instance, when is your annual organization or association meeting and could a water resources discussion with interested members be held in conjunction with the event?*

Without question this is one of the best and most effective approaches. However, presentations for varying groups need to be structured in a manner that is non-threatening and using just one approach is not feasible, and **this approach cannot satisfy the need to reach all members of the public.**

The LWVOR usually has an annual meeting in the spring and would be pleased to sponsor a presentation. In addition many local leagues are also seeking presenters.

6. *What are your main concerns about the process of water resource planning, or are there potential obstacles/deal breakers we should keep in mind?*

As stated previously there are a myriad of agencies, statutes and rules governing water quality and quantity, yet each agency addresses their individual responsibility without a comprehensive state strategy in place. There needs to be an evaluation process included in the strategy to determine the effectiveness of current and future regulation in actual practice and identify conflict created as the result of the different approaches of agencies in regulating water.

The LWVOR believes that all water policy should be for the benefit of the public, which requires establishing a balance between the needs of in-stream and out-of stream uses, between domestic, agriculture and industrial uses, while protecting of the quality of water and planning wisely for the future. To establish the appropriate balance, **the economic and cultural history of our state must be challenged and changes made.** In order for the process to be successful all involved must be willing to make difficult decisions. If this effort is to succeed these decisions must be made and there must be “buy-in” from all water users that is all citizens of the State.

7. *Would the organization that you represent be willing to participate in the planning and development process of Oregon's Integrated Water Resources Strategy? In what way?*

LWVOR is extremely interested in participating in the process. The League would like to provide a representative to serve on the statewide task force. The LWVOR is willing to facilitate meetings and will encourage local Leagues to become involved. The recognized knowledge, integrity, and non-partisan position of the Oregon League of Women Voters could be a valuable asset in developing this essential strategy and assisting with public outreach.