

Advancing Sustainable Groundwater Management in Oregon

Groundwater supports drinking water needs, irrigated agriculture, and ecosystems in Oregon. But groundwater levels are declining across the state.

The Oregon Legislature has taken steps to strengthen groundwater sustainability in response to declining aquifer levels. In 2021, the Legislature passed House Bill 2018, providing funding and direction to the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to develop water budgets for the entire state. These water budgets are critical to the long-term sustainability of communities, businesses, and ecosystems because they provide the foundation for informed water management by improving our understanding of our current and future water supply.

Good water data ensures:

- Flexibility to adapt to changing water use needs, changing climate and shifting water demands.
- Better drought response strategies.
- More rapid identification of emerging risks and development of early interventions.
- Predictability in permitting processes for new development.
- A stronger foundation for local and regional planning decisions.
- Greater confidence for economic investments and policymaking.

About Evapotranspiration (ET) Water Data

One of the most effective ways of understanding water use is by measuring evapotranspiration (ET), which is the water consumed by plants as they grow. ET data is a core component of a water budget because it often represents the largest loss of water in a basin.

OWRD has used ET data to support statewide water availability assessments and water rights decisions, basin-scale groundwater studies, and voluntary and cooperative water management efforts.

HB 2018 authorized targeted investments in evapotranspiration data that are broadly supported across Oregon's water community and essential to strengthening our state's water security and climate resilience.

The 2026 budget would continue supporting this important multiyear investment in resilience by dedicating to \$300,000 for statewide ET data to develop groundwater budgets. Losing these funds puts communities, businesses and farmers at greater risk of depleting our vital groundwater supplies.

HB 2018

- \$2.4M General Fund, 5.75 FTE
- Co-develops groundwater budgets across OR with USGS
- Expands groundwater monitoring
Collect groundwater supply and use data
- Quantifies groundwater recharge & evaporation from reservoirs
- Helps communities use groundwater data

