

Coordinated Water Rights Management and Water Sharing Plan

A strategic approach to water management

September 30, 2021

Water is a precious but limited resource in Southern Oregon. Because of this, the Cities of Ashland, Central Point, Eagle Point, Jacksonville, Phoenix, and Talent—collectively referred to as the Partner Cities—and the Medford Water Commission have come together to protect and ensure access to this vital resource.

Why is this partnership needed?

The Partner Cities hold numerous water rights that authorize the diversion of water at the Medford Water Commission's Duff Water Treatment Plant (WTP). Because of the complications associated with managing multiple water rights at a single point of diversion, the Partner Cities and Medford Water must work together to manage these water rights to ensure they are protected.

This alliance also allows for the sharing of water supplies. Water sharing eliminates the need for some Partner Cities to obtain new water rights, which would only further complicate water rights management. Ultimately, the partnership's efforts will help diversify the region's water supply portfolio, increase the long-term reliability of the water supplies, and provide additional tools for managing through water shortages and drought.

What is the background of the partnership?

The Partner Cities and Medford Water entered into a cooperative agreement for developing a water rights strategy in 2019, and in February 2020, identified a recommended approach. The recommended approach includes two elements (1) water rights certification coordination, and (2) a water-sharing plan.

How does water sharing work?

Under the water-sharing plan framework, the Partner Cities would retain ownership and control of their water rights, and continue to use water under their own water rights from May 1 through September 30 each year. At the end of each year, Medford Water would compare each city's water use to the volume of water authorized by its water rights. Any Partner Cities that used more water than authorized by their water rights would provide compensation to the other Partner Cities for use of water under their rights.

What are the next steps?

Staff from Medford Water and the Partner Cities have been meeting to develop an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) for establishing the Coordinated Water Rights Management and Water Sharing Plan. Staff will continue to keep their Boards and Councils updated and in the near future will bring the IGA to decision makers for their review.

