

# Rogue Water Forum: Summary Materials

This follow-up document encapsulates three ways participants at the 9/5/2025 Rogue Water Forum provided input:

1. **Summary of Next Steps/Ways to Engage Handout:** Participants were provided the opportunity to fill out at the end of the day
2. **Event Feedback Survey:** an online survey was provided to all participants following the event.
3. **Round Table Input:** There were 14 table discussions, and each facilitator provided notes encapsulating participant perspectives and input during the discussion. These notes are summarized below.

## 1. Handout Summary: Next Steps for Collaborative Water Planning in the Inland Rogue

At the closing of the event, participants were encouraged to complete and turn in a handout indicating “next steps” they would be interested in. **If you did not attend the event, or did not fill out the form at the time, we encourage you to share your interest in these next steps by filling out this [Next Steps Form](#). Please only fill out the form if you have not already done so.** Below is a summary of the number of individuals (of the 57 that completed the form) who indicated interest in the various areas identified:

<b>Summary of Participants’ Responses</b>						
As of 10/6/25: <b>57</b> respondents so far						
<i>Help organize the effort</i>	<i>Give more input</i>	<i>Learn about Place-Based Planning</i>	<i>Learn from each other in online format</i>	<i>Contribute to continued assessment of region</i>	<i>Provide funding or resources</i>	<i>Specific project of interest</i>
# interested	# interested	# interested	# interested	# interested	# interested	# interested
<b>22</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>24</b>

**Organization or affiliation of respondents as of 10/6/25: (*Please note: this list describes the stated affiliation of an individual interested in participating in this effort moving forward, not an official endorsement by the organization or agency.*):** Grants Pass Public Works, Grant Pass Irrigation District, Illinois Valley SWCD, Illinois Valley Watershed Council, Oregon Water League, Josephine County Farm Collective, Rogue River Public Works, Medford Public Works, Medford Irrigation District, Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Farmers Union, Rogue River Watershed Council, Jackson SWCD, Rogue Valley Food Network, Southern OR Climate Action Now, Freshwater Trout, OSU, OSU Extension, SOU, City of Gold Hill, Waterwatch, OR Dept of Agriculture, OR Dept of Fish and Wildlife, OR Water Resources Department, Energy Trust, US Army Corps of Engineers, USDA Farm Service, USDA Rural Development, Oregon legislators, OR Regional Solutions Team, water consultants, a rancher, small farmers, private citizens.

## 2. Event Feedback Summary

22 participants provided feedback about the Rogue Water Forum. Responses were very positive. Most participants found the event helpful for building connections, and nearly all rated the need for collaborative, place-based water planning as a high or very high priority. Attendees valued hearing diverse perspectives and emphasized the importance of continued dialogue. A couple participants shared that having such a diversity of water interests in the room talking together brought them hope for the future.

Suggested improvements included more structured networking, broader community and Tribal involvement, and clear links to next steps. A few participants also stressed the importance of transparency in planning approaches and opportunities for meaningful public comments. This included a concern that dominant institutions would drive the group to predetermined solutions without drawing on the experience of locals with on-the-ground knowledge.

This input will help guide the collaborative as it forms. Appreciation to everyone who took the time to provide feedback.

## 3. Rogue Water Forum Round Tables: Perspectives and Input from Discussions

The following notes summarize the themes and various perspectives that emerged in the round table discussions during the September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025 “Rogue Water Forum,” drawn from notes taken by each round table facilitator. There were 14 groups with anywhere from 4-9 participants representing the many different water interests and areas of expertise in the Inland Rogue (Jackson and Josephine Counties). The bulleted statements in each theme or category are generally ordered by the number of participants who made related statements.

*“Water is the foundation of prosperity and health”*

*– Round table participant*

### 1. Water Supply Challenges:

#### **Drought and weather variability:**

- Increased water scarcity in general as a serious issue.
- More uncertainty and unknowns each year now.
- Increased unpredictability and intensity of droughts and shifting precipitation patterns are all leading to increased water insecurity.
- Increased extreme weather events, particularly drought combined with flooding/erosion are really changing the landscape in unpredictable ways.
- Water doesn't stay in the system long; we get quick runoff with little storage.
- People are having challenges due to lack of knowledge about water and their own infrastructure, not because of climate change.

#### **Changing snowpack:**

- Decreased snowpack, early melt, and less freezing days are reducing natural water storage.
- Irrigation districts reliant on snowpack could be negatively impacted.

**Decreasing groundwater recharge:**

- Wells are drying up.
- Lower groundwater recharge rates (*Note: this was questioned in event eval*).

**Increased demand:**

- Demands from urbanization, agriculture, ecosystems, and population growth are all contributing to water availability concerns.

**Water quality concerns:**

- Less recharge is leading to an increase in pollution, contamination, algal blooms, sediment issues.... Solutions for these issues often get priority over addressing quantity.
- Water quality issues are more important than quantity.

***Suggestions related to this theme:***

- Encouragement of practical, low-tech conservation methods (mulching, cover crops, drip irrigation, greywater reuse), dry farming, rainwater catchment, reduced chemical use and soil monitoring were all mentioned.

**2. Infrastructure Issues & Modernization Needs****Aging Infrastructure:**

- Systems are old and are starting to fail. People talked about issues with leaking, ditches overflowing, inefficiencies, inability to manage the amount of water we're getting (particularly stormwater).
- Irrigation districts are at different stages in modernizing infrastructure and practices, with these differences influencing outcomes for ditch members and the surrounding community

**Inadequate Storage:**

- Our existing reservoirs and ponds are insufficient for future needs.
- Storage is the only way to create hydroelectricity.

**New Development Stressors:**

- Population growth and expansion (especially near agricultural land) are straining existing water systems.

***Participant suggestions related to this theme:***

- Infrastructure investment is critical: Many participants spoke to the need for long-term capital investments in water systems.
- Modernizing irrigation delivery: Calls for updated irrigation (e.g., pressurized/piped systems, flood to drip or sprinkler), generally decreasing leakage, storage upgrades, and dam alternatives were mentioned
- Water is not infinite: we need best practices for application. Many people are using oversized pumps, have leaky gaskets, could more strategically time irrigation scheduling.
- Development of master plans and funding navigation for sustainable water projects.

### 3. Policy & Bureaucratic Barriers

#### Complex, Conflicting Regulations:

- Need for improved water use regulations, rights management, and efficient allocation in general.
- Water rights sometimes overlap or are outdated. Policies can be unclear.
- Challenges with inter-basin transfers.
- Enforcement issues are significant in certain industries (cannabis).
- Water is being overallocated.
- There is no water saving when farmers get cut off as it's inefficient and harmful.

#### Lack of Technical Support:

- Many landowners struggle with applications, grants, or accessing funding due to complexity or lack of capacity to meet funder's application requirements.
- Most people don't know what resources or supports are available.

#### Reluctance to Engage:

- Producers and landowners can be wary of bureaucracy or skeptical of government support systems (unclear from notes if this was first or secondhand).
- Increasing water insecurity can foster a scarcity mentality.
- Legacy water rights holders are particularly resistant to change as demand increases.

#### Participant suggestions related to this theme:

- Invest in infrastructure – for water infrastructure, reuse, efficiencies, modernization.... the need for investment was stated by many participants.
- Collaboration among stakeholders is key, including gov't agencies, the private sector, and local groups.

### 4. Competing Water Uses and Demands:

#### Agriculture vs Urban vs Environment:

- Irrigators, cities, homeowners, and fish habitat all competing for limited resources.
- These various systems interconnect and issues are created when addressing one without considering the others –
  - Piping irrigation canals.
  - Dam removals have increased sedimentation at water treatment plants.
  - Well users near irrigation are impacted when irrigation is shut off.
- Forestry and forest health– forest restoration, fuels reduction, managing for fire, and water's role in that.
  - The trees are dying and the landscape is dramatically changing.
  - The forestry industry is dying rapidly -what's next?
  - Firewise eradicates invasive species, which helps fire prevention and water.
- There are changes each of these competing interests could be making – ex new homes could be routinely xeriscaped, and many irrigators have already switched from flood to drip or sprinkler irrigation.
- These competing interests sometimes rely on each other in the face of adversity – ex – farms and Harry and David's Orchards were used as firebreaks in the Alameda Fire.

#### Surface vs Groundwater Tension:

- Participants mentioned overuse of surface water leading to increased reliance on (and over-extraction from) groundwater.

## 5. Values, Education and Public Perception

### Water as Cultural/Economic Identity:

- Water tied to farming heritage, property value, mental and spiritual health.
- Farming is becoming very risky due to weather variations, and that they are a huge employer and central to our region's way of life. "We can't afford to lose this industry."

### Education and Public Awareness:

- Public lacks understanding of conservation needs and opportunities to maximize the benefits they get from available water. Education on water conservation practices and water-use efficiency would empower people.
- There is a need for education about floodplains, flood paths.
- Public education is needed about the effect of limited water on the landscape:
  - need to understand trees' role in intercepting precipitation.
  - need to understand increased evapotranspiration and desertification.
- Public awareness is growing, including youth engagement and shifting cultural values around water.
- Public needs to better understand their own water systems – ex - wells often go dry from overuse & improper construction.

### Community Readiness:

- Some areas are more organized and ready to collaborate than others.
- The public needs to be better prepared for water use emergencies
- The impact of water scarcity and uncertainty is not distributed equitably.
- Political capital is necessary. We need to work through our differences and get organized.

### Missed Opportunities:

- Water markets, reallocation, and incentivizing conservation underused or poorly understood (these are also potential opportunities!).

## 6. Future Risks if No Action Taken

- Increased severity of drought, floods, water quality degradation, and ecosystem damage.
- Economic risks, including threats to agriculture and food security.
- Social and cultural impacts tied to our regional identity and way of life.
- Food prices go up, fish populations go down, irrigation season shortens.
- Irrigators will leave for places with more reliable water.
- Potential for more invasive species and reduced biodiversity.
- Resources are already tight and they're going to get tighter. If we're not prepared it will amplify competition and potential fighting across the different interests.

## 7. Other Suggested Solutions and Strategies

### Proactive vs Reactive:

- Calls to shift from emergency responses to forward-looking planning and systemic change. “Waiting to change decreases our ability to adapt.”
- “Many people need crisis to change. We are comfortable and don’t want to change our habits.”
- Educating new homeowners as they move into the region.

### Strategic Collaborations:

- Emphasis on grassroots efforts and local community collaboration rather than top-down solutions. “Local, competing interests need to work together.”
- Integrating water management with fire prevention, land use planning, and ecosystem restoration was mentioned in a few different ways.
- Need more partnership from federal agencies – one person mentioned the EPA, another mentioned the Bureau of Reclamation and needing a staff person specific to the Rogue Basin.
- The region can learn from cross-agency, nonprofit, and landowner partnerships already in place (e.g., WISE, Hood River model where irrigation water is fully piped).
- It’s difficult to use other regions as a model as our geography is so different.
- Supporting multi-pronged messaging combining hope, loss, and fear to motivate action.
- Coordination across watersheds and sectors to address regional impacts is needed.
- Reach people outside of this one event. Need to identify and continue to reach out to water users and interests who can make an impact.
- How to carry this message of collaboration back to our various “tribes”.

### Local Innovation:

- Learning from other basins, exploring new reuse strategies (ex - treated wastewater for agricultural use).
- We need alternative ways to store water, and/or for people to have a secondary water source.
- One participant encouraged the group to be creative now. Another noted that, “demand means nothing if we don’t have water.”

### Conservation and Restoration Strategies

- Protecting and restoring riparian habitats, wetlands, and native plant genetics.
- Reintroducing natural solutions like beaver dams to restore ecosystems and improve water retention.
- Reimagining the system: rethinking water management entirely — moving to ecosystem-informed approaches.

### Other existing Collaborations

- Irrigation Districts are working together on shared infrastructure needs.
- Bear Creek Restoration Initiative – looking at priority areas, public safety, human use, and fire prevention.
- Rogue Valley Food Network – Cross-sector plan for the Rogue Valley’s food system that specifically calls out water quantity and quality.
- **Note:** These are just the ones that made it into the notes. There is already a lot of collaboration around water to keep our economy and environment healthy.

*“No one has to do anything, but everyone can do something”*

~ Round table participant