

Umatilla Basin Water Chronology

This historical chronology describes critical events and decisions that have impacted water usage in the Umatilla Basin since 1855. The chronology was prepared by water historian Dr. Catherine Howells.

Resources consulted include, but were not limited to:

- Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD)
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)
- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ)
- Oregon Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC)
- Umatilla County Planning Department
- Umatilla County Critical Groundwater Solutions Task Force documents
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) Department of Natural Resources
- US Bureau of Reclamation (BoR)
- United States Geological Survey (USGS)
- National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NWPPCC)

UMATILLA BASIN CHRONOLOGY

- 1855 Treaty with the Walla Walla, Cayuse and Umatilla Tribes and the United States government -- treaty reserved rights for tribes to hunt, fish and gather traditional foods
- 1859 Treaty ratified by Congress
- 1862 Umatilla County created by state legislature
- 1862 Irrigation begins in Umatilla County
- 1864 City of Umatilla incorporated
- 1880 City of Pendleton incorporated
- 1880-1920 population increase
- 1882 Union Pacific Railroad arrives
- 1890 Umatilla Meadows and Butter Creek Canal Company organized to enlarge and extend ditch diverting water from Umatilla River to irrigate land across the river from Echo -- becomes Hinkle Ditch Company
- 1893 Intention of Water Use (first State of Oregon water allocation law)
- 1903 Bureau of Reclamation (BoR) begins investigations to determine feasibility of irrigating lands around the Umatilla River
- 1903 Gaging station established on Umatilla River -- two miles upstream from mouth of the river
- 1903 Hinkle Ditch Company begins irrigating land south and east of Hermiston by diverting water from Umatilla River
- 1905 Furnish Ditch Company begins construction of system to irrigate several thousand acres near Stanfield by diverting water from Umatilla River
- 1906 BoR construction of projects begins after Congressional approval
- 1907 City of Hermiston incorporated
- 1908 Winters v. United States (legal basis for reserved water rights for tribes)
- 1908 Hermiston Irrigation District created

- 1908 Cold Springs Dam and Reservoir, Feed Canal Diversion Dam and Feed Canal completed -- to supply supplemental irrigation water to the Hermiston Irrigation District
- 1909 Furnish Dam completed
- 1910 First Pendleton Round-Up
- 1912 Maxwell Diversion Dam completed
- 1913-17 Three Mile Falls Diversion Dam and West Extension Main Canal built to provide water to West Extension Irrigation District
- 1916 Adjudicated decree of water rights to use waters of Umatilla River and its tributaries (1953 supplemental findings and order of determination identified inchoate rights to be allowed)
- 1917 West Extension Irrigation District created
- 1920 - 1940 Population and economic decline (summer water shortages and soils unsuited for irrigation). Decline in irrigated acreage continued until 1949, when trend reversed
- 1925 First well (125 feet) in Butter Creek area
- 1926 State fish and wildlife experts report that there were no chinook or coho left in the Umatilla River
- 1927 McKay Dam and Reservoir completed -- to supplement water supplies for Stanfield and Westland Irrigation Districts
- 1938 Bonneville Dam completed
- 1940 BoR Pendleton Project initiated
- 1940 - 2000 Population increase due to Federal projects (Umatilla Depot, McNary Dam construction) and manufacturing/processing plants
- 1941 Umatilla Military Reservation established. Operated as onsite explosive washout plant from 1950s to 1965
- 1949 - 1959 Alfalfa production increases 45% (more irrigated alfalfa and less non-irrigated hayland)
- 1950s Irrigation from groundwater begins

- 1951 BoR report on McNary Gravity Investigation concluded to no irrigation facilities were required in McNary Dam and recommended additional study of potential irrigation development areas in the Plymouth Bench area
- 1952 First deep well (554 feet) in Butter Creek Area (deepened to 840 feet in 1961)
- 1954 Pendleton Project Investigation by BoR. Identified several plans for storage and utilization of surplus Umatilla River waters. Concluded that potential irrigable land far exceeded available water supply. No plans were financially feasible in terms of full repayments of reimbursable costs within 40 years (report released locally as an information document to aid local planning)
- 1955 Oregon Groundwater Act: No water rights needed for stockwatering, irrigating lawns or non-commercial gardens of 1/2 acre, for single or group domestic purposes not exceeding 15,000 gallons per day , or for single industrial or commercial purpose not to exceed 5,000 gallons per day
- 1958 First reports of water table decline in Butter Creek area
- 1959 BoR determines available water storage based on adjudicated rights and permits on the Umatilla River
- 1960 Groundwater level monitoring begins in Butter Creek area
- 1960s Groundwater levels dropping in Battle Creek
- 1963 BoR report on possible Birch Creek Diversion Unit -- reanalyzed canal plan and concluded construction still unwarranted
- 1963 OWRD produces map showing location of 480 sub-basin water rights; reports on scarcity of groundwater and minimal recharge
- 1963 OWRD reports that fish life will probably take an increasing non-consumptive use of water in the Umatilla River
- 1963 ODFW conducts survey of steelhead and chinook spawning habitat on the upper Umatilla River
- 1964 Based on local and state concerns, BoR begins study to provide comprehensive analysis of multiple-purpose development potential on basin-wide scale (results published in 1970)
- 1964 Oregon Water Resources Commission adopts Umatilla Basin program
- 1966 Groundwater use for center pivot irrigation begins

- 1966 Congressional authorization for Secretary of the Interior to conduct feasibility investigation to expand irrigation base and address anadromous fishery needs in the Umatilla Basin
- 1969 BoR constructs pumping plant on Columbia River to lift water into West Extension Canal
- 1970 BoR reports that any significant increase in pumping from basalt aquifers would likely result in accelerated decline of water tables
- 1972 72 irrigation wells in Butter Creek area (depth 665-1500 feet)
- 1972 Federal Clean Water Act
- 1973 Oregon Senate Bill 100 signed by Governor McCall. Creates Oregon statewide planning program with the Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC) and the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD).
- 1974 Oregon LCDC adopts 14 statewide planning goals
- 1974 Eastern Central Oregon Association of Counties completes Regional Water System Feasibility Study for Hermiston-Boardman, Oregon
- 1975 Port of Umatilla proposes a regional water system based on their permit for the project of 155 cfs from the Columbia River
- 1976 OWRD designates Butter Creek a Critical Groundwater Area (remanded until 1986)
- 1976 Critical Groundwater Area designated by OWRD for Ordnance Basalt
- 1976 Critical Groundwater Area designated by OWRD for Ordnance Gravel
- 1977 Lost Lake/Depot well owners initiated project to artificially recharge shallow gravel aquifer using existing canal system
- 1980 CTUIR initiates Umatilla Salmon Recovery Project
- 1980 ODFW initiates a steelhead supplementation program
- 1980s Coalition formed between CTUIR and local irrigators to recover salmon populations -- BoR, BPA, OWRD and ODFW participate

- 1980 ODFW begins hatchery outplanting program on Umatilla River to supplement natural production
- 1983+ Umatilla County Comprehensive Plan recognizes that availability of water is a key resource for economic growth
- 1983 ODFW and ODEQ submit minimum streamflow requirements for Umatilla Basin to State Water Resources Board
- 1984 Umatilla Chemical Depot placed on EPA's National Priorities List because of soil and groundwater contamination
- 1984 Formation of Umatilla Basin Project Steering Committee
- 1985 Umatilla River and tributaries withdrawn from further appropriation by Oregon Water Resources Commission and minimal perennial stream flows adopted by Umatilla River and Birch Creek
- 1985 Umatilla Basin Fish Resource Improvement Committee (UBFRIC) adopts plan. Developed in cooperation with CTUIR, ODFW, National Marine Fisheries Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, BoR and Forest Service (funding for plan from BPA)
- 1986 Critical Groundwater Area designated by OWRD for Buttercreek Basalt
- 1986 Report to the Governor, Umatilla Basin Ground Water Task Force (identifies water use concerns and suggests alternatives)
- 1987 Oregon Instream Water Rights Act -- recognizes instream uses as beneficial
- 1988 Umatilla Basin Project authorized and funded by Congress (developed by CTUIR and irrigators coalition -- allows irrigators to exchange Umatilla River water for Columbia River water)
- 1988 Oregon Water Resources Commission approves Oregon Water Plan: Umatilla Basin Sections
- 1989 Oregon Groundwater Quality Protection Act
- 1990 Classified Groundwater Area designated by OWRD for Ella Butte (exempt uses only)
- 1990 ODEQ declares 352,000 acres in Umatilla and Morrow counties as a groundwater management area (GWMA) after discovering elevated levels of nitrates in wells -- leads to the Lower Umatilla Basin GWMA Voluntary Plan

- 1991 Critical Groundwater Area designated by OWRD for Stage Gulch Basalt
- 1991 OWRD enforces compliance against waterspreading
- 1992 Oregon DEQ and EPA conduct sampling to characterize regional groundwater quality -- Lower Umatilla Basin identified as area of elevated nitrate in groundwater
- 1994 Salmon return to the Umatilla River (first time in seventy years)
- 1995 Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) develops anadromous fish restoration plan for Columbia River Basin
- 1997 Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds
- 2003 Umatilla County ranked fifth in state in agricultural commodity sales at \$200 million
- 2003 Oregon Water Resources Department report published -- Ground Water Supplies in the Umatilla Basin
- 2003 Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) Pilot Testing in for City of Pendleton
- 2004 Umatilla County Critical Groundwater Task Force created by the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners in order to develop a "2050 Plan" to assure adequate groundwater for broad community needs through the year 2050
- 2004 Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NWPCC) adopts Umatilla Subbasin Plan
- 2005 Board of Commissioners of Umatilla County adopt Exempt Well Resolution until 2050 plan is authorized