Oregon Water Futures
Webinar #2: Water Justice Movements
July 22, 2020
Today’s Objectives

- Build a picture of what water justice means to this group
- Explore water movements centered in environmental justice
- Understand how those examples relate to Oregon challenges
Oregon Water Futures Project

A collaboration between water and environmental justice interests to elevate the priorities of Indigenous peoples and communities of color across the state to shape the future of Oregon’s water resources.
Oregon Water Futures Project

Illuminating what Water Justice means to Oregonians on the frontlines of our water challenges through community conversations and partnerships.

Project goals:

● Start a conversation about water and environmental justice issues at the community level
● Increase grassroots capacity to advocate for clean water and community priorities
● Connect local leaders to state-level processes
2020 Community Gatherings

Percentage of People of Color by County (Hispanic + non-white)
Source: John Horvick, DHM Research, Political Director on Twitter
Water Justice Movements
California’s Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund

- 1 million+ residents of CA lack access to safe and reliable drinking water
- First state to recognize the human right to clean, safe and affordable water in state law (2012)
  - 140-organization coalition, collective movement

- Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund
  - $130 million annually for 11 years (source: mostly cap & trade revenue)
  - Grounded in environmental justice principles
  - Significant organizing, education and advocacy
  - Impacted residents designed the solutions
  - Fund prioritizes historically marginalized
  - Advisory Council includes affected residents
  - Ongoing foundation support provided operating support and campaign organizational infrastructure

Lanare, California
$472.6 billion needed in water infrastructure investment over next 20 years in US
Federal investment in water infrastructure capital spending has dropped from 63% to 9% since 1977
Almost one-third of American households can’t afford their water bills
We the People of Detroit

- As Detroit suburbs grew, the cost of expansion disproportionately fell on urban Detroit residents
- Water rate hikes led to **shutoffs for more than 30,000 Detroit families**
  -Detroiters pay 3.1% - 21% of income for water and sewerage service
  -Have seen **rates increase 400%** in last 2 decades

- **We the People of Detroit**
  - Hotlines for reporting emergencies by elderly and disabled community members
  - Water stations and water trucks to serve neighborhoods with mass shutoffs
  - Civil disobedience actions to obstruct private company contracted for shutoffs
  - Community-led research to tell their story and frame the narrative in data
Mapping the Water Crisis

- **Mapping the Water Crisis: the Dismantling of African-American Neighborhoods in Detroit**
  - Community Research Collective: Community activists, academics, researchers, designers
  - Documenting the social consequences of austerity policies and emergency management in Detroit, focusing on racial inequity of policies
  - Puts issues in an historical context dating back to the 1950s
  - Part of larger project that includes:
    - City-wide community survey
    - Citizen-science to test water quality
    - Individual and collective narratives
#NoShutoffs COVID-19 Campaign

- Rep. Tlaib (Michigan) introduced Emergency Water is a Human Right Act in April
  - Prevent shutoffs and fund water assistance through LIHEAP
  - Sen. Merkley (Oregon) preparing to introduce Senate version
- Some states have issued statewide moratoriums on shutoffs, some are symbolic
- Oregon water utilities have voluntary moratoriums, but they are beginning to end
- Oregon conversations about statewide water assistance program
  - Still need a consumer protection plan
Houston Coalition for Environment, Equity & Resilience (CEER)

- In 2017, Hurricane Harvey flooded 150,000+ homes in Harris County
- CEER formed post-Harvey to advocate for an equitable recovery (25 organization coalition)
- $2.5 billion recovery bond (2018) included language to ensure an “equitable distribution of funds,” but push back on how equity defined

**Harris Thrives Resolution (2019):**
- Campaign to get equity right: media, public education, policymaker education
- Adopts Equitable Prioritization Framework based on CDC Social Vulnerability Index
- Task force requires geographic representation
- Prioritizes nature-based solutions, natural infrastructure and multi-benefit projects
Water Challenges in Oregon

Questions about unhealthy levels of herbicides in Independence drinking water

60 drinking water providers at risk for harmful algae blooms

Lack of testing or regulation of private domestic drinking water wells; groundwater contamination

Massive flooding in Umatilla County (2019) and Willamette Valley (2018)

Disproportionate nuisance flooding in low-income East Portland neighborhoods

Water Crisis Returns To Warm Springs As Virus Cases Rise

OPB June 2020

Salem water crisis: City spends $75 million to protect drinking water from toxic algae

Statesman Journal May 2019
Organizing for Water Justice in Oregon

- Portland Harbor Community Coalition
- Jordan Cove LNG Pipeline
- Changing Currents Tribal Water Project
- PCUN advocacy for water/sanitation at worksites during COVID-19
Additional US Water Alliance Case Studies:

FINDING THE MONEY
- California: Establishing the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund through community-led organizing
- Ohio: Balancing water quality and ag needs through the H2Ohio Plan

PROTECTING WATER AT THE SOURCE
- Isleta Pueblo: Asserting tribal sovereignty to secure stronger water quality rules
- Georgia: Protecting groundwater sources from hydraulic fracturing with a multi-stakeholder coalition

STRENGTHENING REGULATORY PROTECTIONS ON WATER QUALITY
- Washington: Passing comprehensive PFAS chemical regulation
- Michigan: Enacting the nation’s strongest protections against lead in drinking water

SUPPORTING WATER MANAGEMENT
- New Mexico: Improving water decision-making through data
- Arkansas: Enhancing water service through utility consolidation

REPORT: Policy Innovations to Secure Drinking Water for All (2020)
Questions / Discussion

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Next Webinar: Creating a Water Justice Framework for Oregon

Wednesday, Aug. 19 at 3pm PT

Webinar preview:

● What we’re hearing in our early outreach
● Connecting community priorities to policy pathways and public investment
● Co-developing an advocacy plan for water justice
● Opportunities for a water justice agenda:
  ○ Federal stimulus, Oregon Water Vision, economic recovery, Oregon Climate Action Plan (Gov’s exec order)