

Name	Organization
------	--------------

Goal

Every community member has access to clean water that supports their needs and all living systems.

Description

Equitable access to clean water is a pillar of climate justice. Clean water isn't just a basic human right — it's essential for healthy communities and thriving ecosystems. It fuels public health, fosters well-being and safeguards the natural world.

However, climate change intensifies existing water challenges, including scarcity, pollution and unequal access. This goal goes beyond drinking water and encompasses clean rivers, streams and lakes for swimming, fishing and the overall health of the ecosystem on which we depend.

The climate crisis is leading to hotter and drier summers, more intense rain events, and a shift from snow to rain, even at higher elevations. Wildfire threatens Bull Run, the source of most of Multnomah County's drinking water. Failing infrastructure, human-caused pollution and a lack of infrastructure to treat stormwater runoff imperil fish populations. Work is already underway to address some of these threats, but more needs to be done to preserve and enhance this most precious of life-giving resources.

Metrics	Notes
All area waterways are safe for fishing, swimming and other recreation and cultural activities	
Barriers to migrating (anadromous) fish like salmon and lamprey have been removed throughout Multnomah County watersheds	
All Multnomah County residents have access to clean drinking water	
People have access to safe, accessible places to swim, including pools and in-area waterways	

Strategies	Description
Asset mapping for emergency water resources <i>Type of action: Create/fund program</i>	Water access will be disrupted for a prolonged period by the Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake, while other natural disasters like wildfires and floods also pose a risk to drinking water. An emergency water supply is critical for personal preparation, but community points of emergency water access should also be well-known and distributed throughout the county. Multnomah County should secure funding to help grassroots and community-based organizations secure emergency water supplies and educate the public on how they can prepare for prolonged disruptions from natural disasters.
Create safe places to swim in area rivers <i>Type of action: Advocacy</i>	The Willamette, Columbia and Sandy rivers offer incredible recreational opportunities for area residents. However, access to swimming beaches, particularly on the Willamette River, is limited. Access to swimming in the river has become easier with the addition of ladders to floating docks and beach cleanups. The City of Portland could invest capital dollars to make beaches more inviting and accessible, and provide lifeguards during the summer.

Ensure awareness and access to water utility bill discount programs <i>Type of action: Create/fund program</i>	Every city in Multnomah County offers water utility discount programs. Making sure residents know about the programs and can access them when needed will require navigation assistance and coordination. Service providers, community-based organizations, schools and health clinics should all be equipped to help residents access these programs. Multnomah County, through its community energy programs and SUN schools, can better coordinate access and awareness for these programs.
Incentivize water management and water efficiency <i>Type of action: Advocacy; Mutual Aid</i>	Effectively utilizing rainwater by allowing it to water trees and plants while filtered through the soil is an important strategy to improve water quality and prevent flooding. Portland has long been a leader in requiring runoff from hard surfaces to be channeled to rain gardens in new developments. Retrofitting existing buildings, as well as depaving, are important strategies for cooling neighborhoods and protecting streams. Community-based organizations, municipal partners like cities and school districts, and soil and water conservation districts should prioritize depaving projects, especially in known heat islands. Additional strategies to consider: porous pavement, water collection/rain barrels especially ahead of droughts.
Prevent pesticides and promote practices to avoid runoff of substances like motor oil, car wash residue and weed killer into water <i>Type of action: Advocacy; Governance/Third space</i>	Overuse of pesticides and herbicides is common in urban and suburban areas. Chemical weed killers used to create a “perfect” lawn cause harm to humans and wildlife, especially insects like pollinators. Efforts like “Follow the Water” help people understand that their choices impact water quality. Public policies like pesticide bans also play an important role in protecting people and wildlife. Municipal agencies should expand partnerships and funding for promoting outreach and education, and explore regulations to prevent the sale or use of especially harmful chemicals.
Address Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) <i>Type of action: Governance/Third space</i>	Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) tend to occur in warm waterways with poor circulation (runoff also plays a role). Climate change is increasing water temperatures. Areas like Ross Island Lagoon, created by mining, are becoming a frequent source of HABs in the lower Willamette River, which runs through Portland. Improved monitoring and public communication are helping to protect people and pets from harm, but solutions can be found for specific known problem areas like Ross Island Lagoon. Restoring a flushing channel to allow the river to flow through the Ross Island Lagoon would address the major source of HABs in the lower Willamette River.
Find a non-toxic alternative to 6PPD in car tires <i>Type of action: Advocacy; Governance/Third space</i>	6PPD is a chemical used in the production of car tires. As car tires wear out due to normal use, tiny particles of the tire will flow into local waterways through stormwater runoff. 6PPD has been conclusively linked to endangered coho salmon death. Finding non-toxic alternatives to 6PPD is vital to protecting coho runs, particularly in urban areas like Multnomah County. Multnomah County should continue to convene a 6PPD work group and look for advocacy opportunities at the state or federal level to promote the use of inert chemicals in tires.
Prioritize and fund the removal of culverts that block fish passage <i>Type of action: Create/fund program</i>	Outdated culverts that are too small or shaped like a pipe can create barriers to fish passage and hurt migrating fish. Culverts are a legacy of road construction practices from the mid-20th century that did not consider infrastructure impacts on migratory fish like salmon. These projects are both costly and time-consuming and should be prioritized based on the greatest potential habitat restoration potential. Multnomah County has received funding to replace a final failing culvert on Beaver Creek. As that project is completed, the County should prioritize other culverts that create barriers for fish.
Expand water system education, including where it comes from, how to read water utility bills, accessing and understanding water quality reports <i>Type of action: Mutual Aid; Advocacy</i>	Water can be among the most expensive utilities that people have to pay for. Water agencies, potentially with the help of partner community-based organizations, should educate customers on the water system, how to read bills, and ways to conserve water and save money.
Provide water test kits <i>Type of action: Create/fund program</i>	Free lead testing kits are available from local water utilities. While area utilities have removed lead pipes from the delivery system, some buildings may still have pipes or fixtures that contain lead. Making sure that people are aware of the availability of test kits is vital for public health.

Invest in recreational water activities for youth in North and Northeast Portland <i>Type of action: Advocacy</i>	Access to swim lessons and neighborhood pools is key to developing water safety skills. Black children aged 10-14 years drown in swimming pools at rates over seven times higher than white children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). North and Northeast Portland, home to many Black residents, lack access to swimming facilities and swim lessons. Investing in facilities and lessons is critical, especially as extreme heat makes swimming an important adaptive strategy for staying cool.
Clean and restore the Willamette River and surrounding land <i>Type of action: Advocacy</i>	The lower reach of the Willamette River — the area that runs through Portland north of the Fremont Bridge — is contaminated by the legacy of industrial uses along the river. A planned cleanup of contaminated sediments has been in process for over 20 years and the area is a listed Superfund site. Organizations like the Portland Harbor Community Coalition have been pushing for an equitable and thorough cleanup of the river while minimizing harm to frontline communities near the cleanup.

Notes