



CITY OF

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In My Opinion:
Water House and other conservation strategies are key to Portland's water future
by Commissioner Randy Leonard

Recently, *The Oregonian* published an article and an editorial describing some projects that are driving Portland's water rates, but unfortunately they only told part of the story.

Portland's Bull Run watershed is one of the most pristine water sources in the world, and it serves over 900,000 people in the Portland metropolitan area. Already the Bull Run water system often lacks the storage capacity to meet all of our customers' needs through the dry summer months. Some have argued that the City of Portland should construct a third dam in the Bull Run that would double Portland's current water storage capacity.

The costs of a third dam would be approximately \$1 billion, which is to say nothing of the costs and impacts a third dam would have on the old growth forests and animal habitat in the Bull Run watershed.

In my view, the costs—both in dollars and in loss of old growth forest and wildlife habitat—are unacceptable.

Thus, to stretch our current Bull Run storage capacity as much as possible, the Portland Water Bureau promotes many ways to conserve our precious water. The Water Bureau promotes conservation through programs that help customers obtain high efficiency shower heads, toilets, faucets, and sprinklers, they provide educational seminars to organizations and schools about methods of conserving water, and they promote and educate the general public about water conservation through radio ads, billboards, and other media. Because of efforts like these, citizens have responded and the Portland Water Bureau has seen water consumption drop more than 13% over the past 10 years, despite steady growth in the number of customers it serves.

In spite of those efforts, most homebuilders and homeowners in Portland do not yet incorporate the latest water conservation technology into their homes.

The first house in Oregon to be certified a "WaterSense" home by the US Environmental Protection Agency is the Portland Water House, which was built as a part of our efforts to develop and showcase water conservation strategies that help offset the need for a third dam in the Bull Run. The Water Bureau is using the Water House to demonstrate to homebuilders and homeowners how they can incorporate water conservation devices and strategies into their homes. Last Sunday alone, hundreds of Portlanders toured the home.

The Water House was constructed in a working class neighborhood on a surplus parcel that the Water Bureau acquired when it absorbed the Richland Water District in 1990. Although *The Oregonian* calculated a higher cost, the actual cost of the Water House was less than \$408,000.

The Water Bureau's efforts to promote conservation are invaluable to our future stewardship of the Bull Run watershed, and to the continued availability of the best drinking water in the world to generations of Portlanders. The construction of the Water House by the Portland Water Bureau provides a living demonstration of ways in which we can conserve more water and gives us one more tool to protect one of our most valuable resources.