

# Serious Water Management Problem Area (SWMPA)

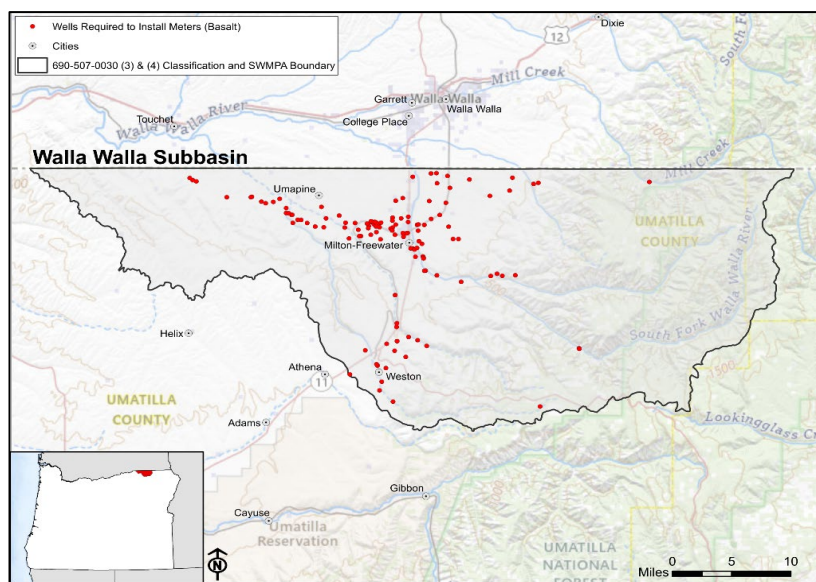
**Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 540.435** and **Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) 690-085** authorizes the Oregon Water Resources Commission to go through a rulemaking process to identify and designate areas where water concerns are significant enough to warrant special attention and potentially stricter management practices.

## *What Is a Serious Water Management Problem Area (SWMPA)?*

SWMPA requirements can be applied to current and future water use, whether it is surface water, groundwater, or both. By implementing a SWMPA through rule, OWRD can require water use metering and reporting which will help inform further water management actions.

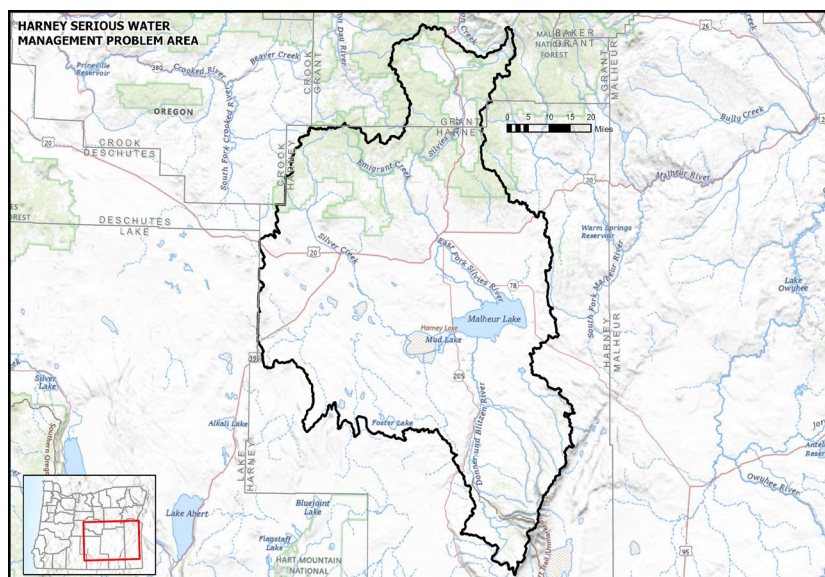
A SWMPA can be designated based on a variety of water concerns such as:

- Water availability: Areas where water demand significantly exceeds supply.
- Conflict among water users: Areas with ongoing disputes or conflicts over water use.
- Environmental impacts: Areas where water use is impacting fish, wildlife, or other environmental values.



**In 2017, The Walla Walla Subbasin in Umatilla County became the first SWMPA.**

OWRD staff have been collecting annual water use and water level measurements from wells subject to the designation. These data are being used in a current groundwater study to better understand the impacts of groundwater pumping on water levels within the study area.



**In 2025, The Harney Basin became the second SWMPA in Oregon.**

Water users within the Harney SWMPA are required to install totalizing flow meters by March 2028, to report water use for 2028.

## How is a SWMPA Designated?

1. **Identification of Problem Areas:** OWRD, alongside communities, identifies areas with water concerns, such as water scarcity, quality concerns, or conflicts among users.
2. **Assessment and Analysis:** OWRD collects data on water resources in the area, such as water availability, environmental impacts, and water usage patterns.
3. **Public Involvement:** OWRD conducts public meetings and educational programs to raise awareness and ensure the community's input is considered in the decision-making process.
4. **Designation of SWMPA:** Based on data and public input, the Oregon Water Resources Commission may designate an area as a SWMPA in rule. This process must:
  - Specify the nature of the problem.
  - Define the boundaries of the areas involved.
  - Specify who is required to install measuring devices.
  - Define specifications for the types of measuring devices that must be installed.
  - Specific annual reporting requirements.
  - Provide timelines for implementation.

Any affected person may present alternative options for measuring devices, data collection methods, or data reporting formats to the Commission.

5. **Implementation of Management Strategies:** Once designated, the SWMPA requires users to install and maintain a totalizing flowmeter and annually report their use.
6. **Monitoring and Review:** SWMPA areas are regularly monitored, and adjustments may be made to ensure that the water management goals are being met.

## Can a SWMPA be Removed?

The Commission has the authority to remove a SWMPA designation through additional rulemaking processes if water use measurement is no longer needed.

## Why is Metering Important to Water Management and Planning?

Metering is important to OWRD because it strengthens the department's ability to monitor water use accurately and ensure compliance with water rights. Reliable metering data helps support transparent, defensible decision-making around allocation, enforcement, and planning. It also improves the state's capacity to identify trends, protect limited resources, and promote sustainable water management across Oregon's basins.



### Learn more about the Water Measurement Cost Share Program!

OWRD may be able to pay for up to 75% of the cost to install, repair, or replace an authorized measuring device. Reach out to your local water master for more information.

[www.owrd.info/watermaster](http://www.owrd.info/watermaster)

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