

# Drinking the Willamette – The Power of Public Education

PNWS-AWWA 2008 Annual Conference  
May 1, 2008

Mark Knudson, P.E, Chief Engineer, Tualatin Valley Water District  
Libby Barg, Senior Associate, Barney & Worth, Inc.



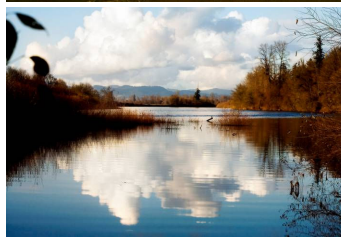
## The Willamette River Story

- 13th largest river in the US
- 187 mile mainstem – southeast of Eugene to the Columbia River at Portland
- 13 major tributaries
- Drains approximately 1/8 of Oregon's total area





## The River's Landscape

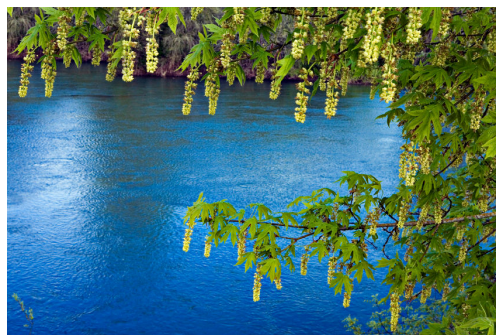


- Half of the largest cities in Oregon are on the banks of the Willamette River
- Travels through 10 counties
- More than 100 cities in the basin



## Water Source for Oregon Communities

- Adair Village
- Halsey
- Springfield
- Corvallis
- Wilsonville



Many communities have Willamette River water rights.

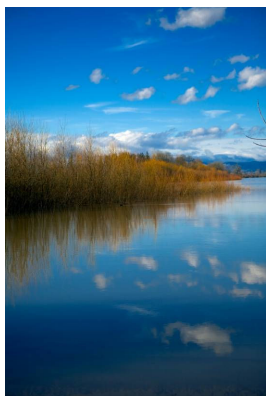


## Water Quality Perception

- *"An open sewer."*  
1907 – newly created Oregon Board of Health
- *"Filthy and ugly."*  
1927 – Portland City Club study
- *Pollution in Paradise*  
1962 – Tom McCall's famous documentary
- Portland CSO program  
*"Dirtiest river in the country"*
- *"Superfund Site"*  
2000 – EPA declares Portland Harbor a superfund site



## Water Quality Improvement



*"Decades of work and millions of dollars of investment by the State, industry, and cities has reversed some of the worst damage to the Willamette River. Cities and industries began treating wastewater in the 1950's, and treatment has improved steadily since."*

— Oregon Department of Environmental Quality



## How Public Perception Affects Water Supply Choices

- Wilsonville
- Portland
- TVWD
- Lake Oswego / Tigard



## Lake Oswego / Tigard Study

- Two cities explore benefits of merging their water systems
  - Lake Oswego water rights
    - Clackamas River 38.14 mgd
    - Willamette River 3.88 mgd
  - Tigard water rights
    - Willamette River 25.8 mgd (pending)
- Lake Oswego's Clackamas River supply would be primary source
- Willamette River: potential option for Tigard



## 15 years of Public Opinion Research

- Lake Oswego / Tigard Water Supply Analysis: Stakeholder interviews (2006)
- Survey of Corvallis voters (2006)
- Survey of Tualatin Valley Water District (2005)
- Survey of Sherwood voters (2005)
- Survey of Portland area voters (2005)
- Survey of Tigard Water District voters (1998)
- Survey of Wilsonville voters: mail survey (1998)
- Survey of Wilsonville voters: telephone survey (1998)
- Regional Water Supply Plan: Metro area focus groups (1995)
- Survey of Portland residents (1995)
- "Contingent Valuation Survey" (1994)
- Regional Water Supply Plan: Survey of tri-county residents (1994)
- Regional Water Supply Plan: Stakeholder interviews (1993)



## Survey Results Show the Effects of 100 Years of Bad Press

- Respondents always prefer other water sources.
- Solid core (10% to 30%) of voters strongly oppose using Willamette River water.

*Water quality of Willamette River*  
11% Good / very good  
48% Poor  
Survey of Portland area Voters (2005)



*68% favor Portland (Bull Run) water versus 13% Willamette River.*

Tualatin Valley Water District  
Survey of TVWD Voters (2005)

## The Bad Publicity Continues...

Home » Forums » Issues » Public Safety

### Willamette River Water in your faucet?

Submitted by argrezi on August 13, 2007 - 5:30pm.

Most people know the Willamette River has serious problems. One of the local water authorities in Washington County(TVWD [Tuslain Valley Water District](#)) is looking to get its water from Willamette. A few local water authorities have already started to go along with drinking Willamette River water. This is the next in a series of moves by local governments to move away from cleaner sources of water Hagg Lake, Bull Run, etc. and move to the polluted Willamette River.

Would you let your family drink Willamette River water? Do you think it can ever be safe? While I don't know the answer to the first question, I definitely don't know the answer to the second.

[Willamette River water? Yuck!](#)

Submitted by Glen\_Geller on October 25, 2007 - 11:01am.

Washington County Democratic Party Headquarters  
12250 SW Broadway  
Beaverton, OR 97005

503

KA  
BI  
Save It  
Spring  
Saturdays  
King C  
(registr  
shortly)

CITY OF SHERWOOD  
**Measure No. 34-9**

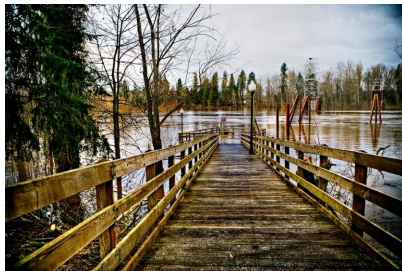
ARGUMENT AGAINST

**DEMAND HIGHER STANDARDS FOR YOUR DRINKING WATER**

On Oct. 26th the Sherwood City Council voted to go to the Willamette River as its long term drinking water source. The following day an article in The Oregonian stated:

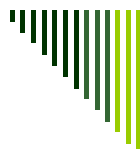
**"The Sherwood City Council on Tuesday voted in favor of participating in a water treatment plant that would allow a handful of southwest suburban cities to drink from the Willamette River."**

## Opportunity: Most Voters Remain Open-Minded



- Citizens say they don't know much about their current drinking water supply.

- Only moderate awareness of long-term water supply issues.
- Finished water quality - most important decision factor.
- Customers remain open-minded about the best future water source.



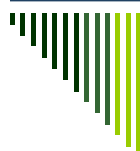
## Opportunity: Public Information and Education Works!

1. Communities facing water shortages are more open.
2. Public education can gain customer acceptance.
3. Proactive communication becomes the foundation for informed decisions.



Drinking the Willamette River –  
The Power of Public Education

12



## Public Education Materials

### Fact Sheets

#### Nearby cities renew interest in the Willamette

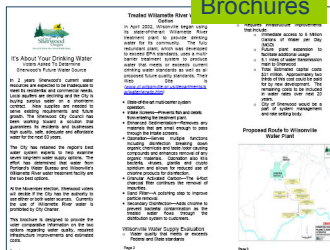
Wilsonville Spokesman  
Monday, April 11, 2005  
By Curt Kipp

*An informational campaign may be just the beginning for Sherwood and other cities*

Since 2002, treated Willamette River water has been piped into Wilsonville homes.

Could neighboring cities be next?

### Brochures



### Web Sites



Drinking the Willamette River –  
The Power of Public Education

13





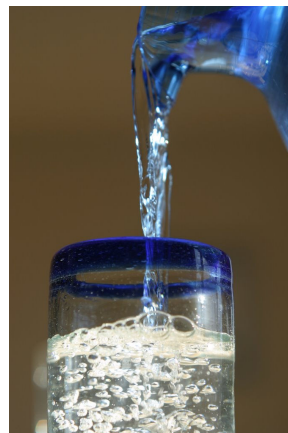
## Finding the Right Message

- Conservation is ranked as the top priority source.
- Perceived benefits of Willamette River water include:
  - available
  - less effect on pipes
  - treatable / drinkable
  - cost savings
  - proximity
  - assurance of long-term supply



## Finding the Right Message

- The Willamette River already provides drinking water to some communities – with little concern.
- Value of advanced treatment technology.







## Overcome Negative Perception

Consider all available water supply options – regardless of negative public perception.



- First step: an aggressive water conservation program.
- Credible and effective water treatment is a must.
- Public education can mitigate opposition.



## “A Little Education Goes a Long Way”

- What can happen after a 20-minute presentation?
- Examples: funding critical transportation projects

# Public Education Works!

## PDOT Community Consultation: 2005-2006

*Before tonight's forum, were you aware of the funding gap in Portland's transportation budget?*

### Before

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Fully understood | 28% |
| Little / no idea | 38% |

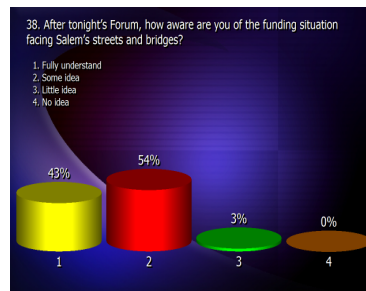
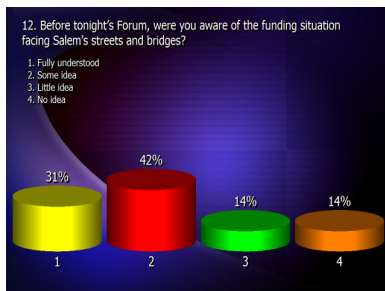
### After

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Fully understand | 45% |
| Little / no idea | 5%  |



## Before tonight's forum, were you aware of the funding situation facing Salem's streets and bridges?

|                  | <u>Before</u> | <u>After</u> |
|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Fully understood | 31%           | 43%          |
| Little/no idea   | 28%           | 3%           |





## “A Little Education Goes a Long Way”

- Other examples? Share your best stories!



## Drinking the Willamette – the Power of Public Education

- Conclusion: Public education works!  
Even 100 years of “bad press” can be overcome with facts – if well communicated.



## Drinking the Willamette – the Power of Public Education

□ Questions?