

# Water Resources

**I**f Hood River County were a body, the Hood River and its many tributaries would be its circulation system. The topography, recreation, economy and culture of our community have been shaped by these water bodies. Whether skiing, irrigating our orchards, windsurfing, fishing, brewing beer or bathing our children, nearly everything we do is somehow tied to our water resources. In all likelihood, these resources also played a role in your decision to move to this county. The health and availability of these resources have a direct effect on the quality of life we can expect as members of this community, now and in the future. That is why we all have a responsibility to care for these resources - for the sake of the members of our community, its wildlife and those living downstream.

## Rules for Water Resource Protection

Because the water resources in our community are so valued, many rules and regulations have been formed to protect them. They range from federal laws such as the Clean Water Act to state laws like the Oregon Agriculture Water Quality Management Act. Water resources as they relate to irrigation and agriculture are discussed in the chapters “Agricultural Water Quality Rules” and “Irrigation Water Management.”

## The Water Code

Under Oregon law, all water is publicly owned. With some exceptions, cities, farmers, factory owners and other water users must obtain a permit or water right from the Water Resources Department to use water from any source, whether it is underground or from lakes or streams. Generally speaking, landowners with water flowing past, through or under their property do not automatically have the right to use that

water without a permit. Check out the chapter entitled, “Irrigation Water Management” for more details on your water rights.

**Remember,  
we all live  
downstream.**

## Fish Passage Requirements

Native migratory fish exist throughout many streams in Hood River County. Activities that hinder or prevent passage of fish are discouraged and in most cases illegal. If you are involved in activities that may affect fish passage such as installing culverts or creating irrigation diversions, please call the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) before starting work. Oregon’s fish passage rules can be found online at [www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/passag](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/passag).

## Flooding

If you live near a waterway, chances are you will face the natural rise and fall of the water level in that waterway. Flooding is a natural stream process. A floodplain is the land that is inundated with water



*Because our watershed is heavily influenced by Mt. Hood’s glaciers and snow packs, our rivers are susceptible to flashy debris torrents as seen in November 2006.*

during floods. This area allows flood waters to spread out and slow down, reducing their erosive force. When a stream is able to naturally expand into its floodplain, it rejuvenates the ecosystem by replenishing nutrients and recharging aquifers. However, many of the streams in the Hood River Watershed have lost their connection to their floodplain by being confined into canals, ditches and culverts for development purposes. When this happens, property-damaging flood events are often the result, and houses and buildings in the floodplain fall victim.

The “perfect storm” of steep topography, low-level snowpacks and marine storm systems moving across our region in winter can result in “rain-on-snow” storm events, with devastating results. Flow changes can be driven by alterations in type and density of vegetation, roads and buildings as well as in soil infiltration rates (how quickly water can seep into the ground). These changes can affect the magnitude, duration and impact of floods.

So what does it mean? Maintaining floodplain connectivity and vegetation along your reach of stream

can drastically reduce chances of sustaining damage from a flood event. Building above the floodplain will greatly reduce flood damage to structures. Check out the chapter called “Riparian Areas, Wetlands and Water Quality Management” for more details on car-



*Rainbow trout are one of the Hood River’s common resident fish species.*

ing for waterways on you land.

### **Important Fish Species in the Hood River**

Due to its geographic location between semi-arid eastern Oregon and marine-influenced western Oregon, Hood River County has a mixture of fish species from both regions.

The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation (CTWS), ODFW and USDA Forest Service are trying to restore wild salmon, steelhead and other native fish in the Hood River through habitat restoration and protection as well as water quality/quantity improvements. The state, tribal and federal agencies work collaboratively with the county, local landowners, irrigation districts and the Hood River Watershed Group to protect and enhance native fish and aquatic habitat in the Hood River.

Important salmon and trout species present in the Hood River and surrounding streams include:

- Resident rainbow trout: common and widely distributed throughout the Hood River system.
- Coastal cutthroat trout: distributed throughout much of the headwater areas and tributaries of Hood River and Phelps Creek. They are listed with the state as a sensitive species.
- Bull trout: exist primarily in the Middle Fork of the Hood River and its tributaries. They are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act as

threatened and are the only remaining stock of bull trout in the Mt. Hood National Forest.

- Mountain whitefish: fairly common on the mainstem of the Hood River. Little is known about their life cycle or abundance in the Hood River.
- Chinook salmon: found in the Hood River. Both the spring and fall runs of this species are present. The native run of spring Chinook in the Hood River is extinct. CTWS and ODFW are working to re-establish this run in the basin.
- Coho salmon: found in the Hood River and are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened.
- Steelhead trout: Both the summer and winter runs of this anadromous (ocean-going) form of rainbow trout are present in the Hood River. Steelhead are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

### **Fishing opportunities in Hood River County**

The Hood River is currently open all year to steelhead angling from the Columbia River to Powerdale Dam (the lowest 4 miles of river). The river has both a summer run and a winter run of steelhead, both popular with anglers. The summer run of steelhead typically peaks in mid-September, while the winter run of steelhead peaks in late March.

Opportunities to angle for salmon in the Hood River vary on an annual basis based on estimated run sizes. Anglers are encouraged to check for updated fishing regulation changes on the ODFW website at [www.dfw.state.or.us](http://www.dfw.state.or.us). Tribal harvest of spring Chinook salmon remains an important source of subsistence for members of the CTWS. For information regarding the Hood River tribal fishery contact the Hood River Production Program at (541) 352-9326.

*Article written in cooperation with: Chris Brun and Joe McCanna, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, Jason Seals, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Ellen Hammond, Oregon Department of*

### **Resources**

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
[www.dfw.state.or.us](http://www.dfw.state.or.us)

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality  
[www.oregon.gov/DEQ/WQ/](http://www.oregon.gov/DEQ/WQ/)

Oregon Water Resources Department  
[www.oregon.gov/OWRD/](http://www.oregon.gov/OWRD/)