



ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY STUDY TEAM 2017

The Environment?

What is environmentalism about? It's about anything we humans didn't create—air, water, soil, plants and animals—all contained on planet earth. Earth itself has been around for billions of years—it's been hot/cold/dry/wet. So we are not working to “save the planet”. The planet will be fine. Environmentalism is about keeping the earth livable for all us.

We all want a healthy and sustainable future for ourselves, our family and our friends. A healthy environment not only provides a wonderful playground of forests, rivers and parks for all of us but also economic benefits* from paper production to sustainable seafood.

Where Are We Successful?

Oregon has a stellar history of tackling environmental issues in creative ways. We are a national leader with strong laws, engaged citizens, a spirit of innovation and lots of natural beauty. Some iconic initiatives:

Culture of Recycling:

- The Bottle Bill: The 1971 Oregon Bottle Bill was the very first bottle bill in the U.S. Created to address a growing litter problem along Oregon beaches, highways and other public areas, it includes a 10 cents refundable fee. [Bottle Bill Resource Guide]
- Curbside Collection: In 1983, the Oregon legislature mandated that every community set up a system to provide its residents the opportunity to recycle. Since 2011, all residences with curbside collection are provided weekly recycling and composting collection. A year into the new curbside collection system, 38% less residential waste was headed to the landfill. [City of Portland Planning and Sustainability Department]

Land Protection:

- Land Use Bill: Designed to reduce sprawl, in 1973, Oregon enacted an innovative land use planning law that requires that every city in the state draw a line around the city—the urban growth boundary. Development is not allowed outside the line—that land is saved for farming.
- Beach Bill: The Oregon Beach Bill, passed in July 1967, declares that all “wet sand” within sixteen vertical feet of the low tide line belongs to the state of Oregon providing the public has “free and uninterrupted use of beaches.” [Wikipedia.org/OregonBeachBill]
- Forestry: Sustainability is at the core of the Oregon Forest Practices Act. The law states that continuous growing and harvesting trees is the leading use of private forestland. And it requires that we also protect soil, air, water and wildlife for future generations.

Clean Air:

- Portland's Climate Action Plan: The city of Portland is a worldwide leader and devised the world's first climate action plan back in 1993. Last year the city and county won an international award for their plan from the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group. Carbon emissions have fallen 41% on a per-capita basis since 1990.

Transportation:

- Portland has the most extensive transit program of the West Coast cities. 7.2% Portland commuters go by bike, the highest percentage of any large American city. [PBOT: 1/16]

* A 2008 study showed 50,000 jobs related to sustainability including habitat protection, solar manufacturing, wind power development, and many more. Oregon.gov.

What are Our Gaps?

Report Card:

How are we doing in Oregon addressing the critical issues? Have we improved since the 1970s?

Issue	Now	1970s	Sources
Air Quality	All areas of Oregon are meeting national standards. With the growing population (20%+ between 2000-2015), increased toxics, increased diesel traffic, and specific industrial emissions need to be addressed.	Improvement made; In the 70s we had serious haze issues, and frequent days of unhealthy pollution that violated federal standards	DEQ home page Oregon.gov Air quality index overview
Water Quality	Water quality varies by watershed. Many rivers incl. Deschutes and Rogue have problems with high temperatures and various toxics. Seven lakes in Oregon have received health warnings since 2004 for algae blooms that pose dangers to fish and animal habitats.		DEQ Water Quality Report
Willamette River	Our overall grade is B-. The Willamette is worse around Portland, better as you go south. We see poor temperatures, and water quality, pretty good habitat protection and flow. Increased toxics and agricultural run-off.	An unhealthy river. Dioxin and other serious pollutants caused by “in-discriminate dumping” and industrial run-off, deformed fish, influential report by Tom McCall. “Pollution in paradise”.	Willamette River Report Card, Eco-health report card Oregon History Project, Oregon Historical Society.
Climate Change	We are a national leader with a projected 80% of our electricity to be carbon-free by 2030. However, we are not targeted to meet our state’s global warming goals because of increased emissions from the transportation sector.	In the 70s no work had been done yet to reduce the threat from climate change.	Report to the Oregon Legislature from the Oregon Global Warming Commission, January 2017.

What are Our Priorities?

- Engage Wider Audiences: We need to attract and engage new audiences and advocates such as rural and low-income communities and people of color to get involved. [Example is Verde]
- Communications: We need to go beyond the bubble to listen and problem solve with other populations. We need to expand the universe of concern and action and find ways to help environmental groups to communicate more effectively with all.
- Sustainability: As a community we need to support sustainability as a key driver/economic opportunity/motivator for the state. We need more funding for DEQ and cities to monitor/enforce as well as support for important laws. [Example: reduced federal funding for the EPA and other programs makes it even more critical today to speak to your government representatives].
- Contribute: We need to find leveraged ways to contribute. Find organizations that you believe are doing great work to support our environment and contribute time & money. [Example: Columbia Land Trust, Oregon Wild]