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Water, uninterrupted: Your investments in Portland's water systems are paying off.

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After several weeks of relying on our supplemental water source, groundwater from the Columbia South Shore Well Field, the Portland Water Bureau returned to 100 percent Bull Run water last week. The groundwater system allowed us to provide clean, safe drinking water to the region despite two extreme weather events that impacted our Bull Run supply: record-breaking hot, dry temperatures that extended well into fall; and an atmospheric river of rainfall that resulted in increased turbidity in the Bull Run supply.

"Providing clean and safe drinking water to the region during these extremes is impressive," Portland Water Bureau Director Gabriel Solmer said. She credits the bureau's ability to respond to the unanticipated events of the last two months without service interruption to staff members' excellent preparedness and skill and the community's ongoing investment in the water system.

"We know that climate change and other unknown risks will threaten our water supply. When you pay your water bill, you're investing in our community's ability to endure these challenges now and in the future."

Why we activated our groundwater system

In early November, intense storms flushed nearly seven billion gallons of water of into the Bull Run Reservoirs in a 24-hour period, bringing with it a significant amount of organic material that resulted in elevated turbidity (cloudiness) levels. Elevated turbidity makes water treatment less effective.

On Nov. 5, we switched to groundwater to provide 100 percent of our water supply. This was the third activation of our groundwater system this year. The first activation, in August, was for the annual maintenance run to make sure wells and pumps were working properly. In October — the second activation — we relied on the system to supplement the Bull Run water supply as dry, hot temperatures persisted well into fall.

Take note! After a turbidity event, it can take up to two weeks to receive 100 percent Bull Run water, depending on your location. As the Bull Run water moves into the system, people may notice a slight tea-like color in the water. This discoloration is harmless and should clear as the reservoirs refill with new rainfall. If you have concerns about the quality of your water, contact us: wewaterline@portlandoregon.gov or 503-823-7525.

Water system investments matter

Our ability to reliably provide clean, safe water for future generations relies on ongoing investments in our water system.

The groundwater system is an important supplemental water source that allows us to stay flexible and adapt. It performed well but is not intended to be a primary water source and cannot meet long-term community demand for water. [A new Bull Run water filtration facility](#) will further improve our ability to respond to storms and treat for *Cryptosporidium* or other naturally occurring organisms that exist in the watershed. Construction on the facility will begin in 2023, and the facility is planned to be operational in 2027.

Thankful for the water experts who make it happen

Supplying drinking water to nearly one million Oregonians requires a dedicated, highly skilled workforce. The Portland Water Bureau employs about 600 people.

“When you turn on the tap and the water is there without complication, it’s easy to overlook the complex work that makes it happen,” said Chris Wanner, Director of Operations. “Engineers, construction crews, planners, customer service staff, lab techs — the list of specific expertise is long. These public servants work hard every day to protect our health and safety.”

Learn more

Groundwater: portland.gov/water/groundwater

Bull Run Filtration: portland.gov/water/bullruntreatment/filtration

Questions about water quality at your Portland property?

Call the Water Line at 503-823-7525 or email wewaterline@portlandoregon.gov.

About the Portland Water Bureau

The Portland Water Bureau serves water to almost a million people in the Portland area. Portland’s water system includes two great water sources, 53 tanks and reservoirs, and 2,200 miles of pipes. With 600 employees working on everything from water treatment to customer service, the Water Bureau is committed to serving excellent water every minute of every day.