Media Release

Portland Water Bureau

For Immediate Release

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**Investing in Your Infrastructure: Water Bureau Sets Record for Proactive Pipe Replacement Despite Pandemic Setbacks**

**NOTE: B-roll footage of crews working in the field available upon request.**

When the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic first struck, Water Bureau work crews adapted quickly to their changing work conditions. Pivoting to what they call “Quaranteams,” work crews of approximately ten people who work together exclusively, were formed to reduce risk while increasing productivity.

Despite many restrictions and challenges, the Portland Water Bureau’s Maintenance & Construction (M&C) Division broke a record for new pipe installation, making major gains in maintaining aging infrastructure. In fiscal year 20/21, crews proactively replaced 31,700 feet of pipe. This record was set with pandemic restrictions in place such as limits to sharing equipment and vehicles, and other statewide restrictions on how they completed their work. The prior record, set two years ago, was 28,000 feet of pipe replaced. In the last decade, the average was approximately 23,000 feet of proactively replaced pipe.

The increase in output follows guidance from the bureau’s Asset Management Division whose function is to evaluate our system assets, weighing the consequence and likelihood of failure, and recommending strategies to mitigate any with higher consequence. The expected useful life of cast iron pipe in our system is estimated to be around 125 years, and Asset Management analysis revealed that in the next 20-40 years, large cohorts of pipe installed in the early to mid 1900s will enter the late stages of their useful life. With this in mind, the bureau has ramped up its replacement pace both with in-house resources and contractors. The bureau plans to continue its ramp up of pipe replacement along with contractors to reach a pace of approximately 40,000 feet each year over the next 5 years.

The new pipe that is being installed is ductile iron, which is designed to last 250 years in Portland’s soil conditions. To further increase efficiency, as pipes are being replaced, they are being right-sized for improved water quality, fire protection, and additional fire hydrants for neighborhoods.

“The maintenance demands of our system did not slow down due to the pandemic and we are really proud of our team for achieving this goal during such a challenging year,” said Kovatch, “From our engineering staff who designed it to our crews who installed it, it takes a lot of coordination and effort, and despite many hurdles presented by the pandemic, the Water Bureau had its most productive year of pipe replacement ever.”

### 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.