



# Is it Raining?<sup>1</sup>

## Oregonians Awareness and Expectations of Environmental Challenges

Oregon Values and Beliefs Panel Survey  
June 2020

Oregon is in the middle of a drought. Most Oregonians may not realize this as their attention has been largely focused on COVID-19. We are curious to know how aware Oregonians are of Oregon's water issues and their perceptions for Oregon's environmental challenges in the future.

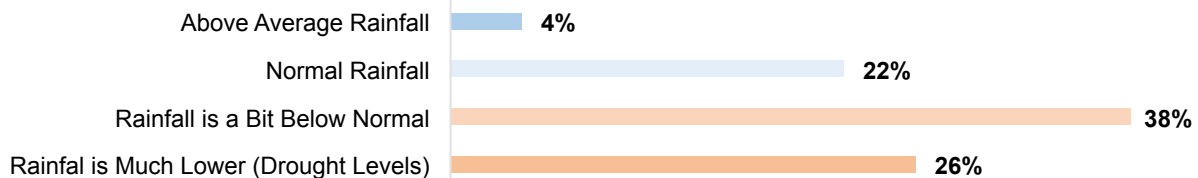
These findings come from the fielding of the monthly DHM-OVBC Oregon Values and Beliefs Panel Survey. The online survey was conducted from May 29-June 7, 2020. It surveyed 900 Oregonians. To ensure a representative statewide sample, demographic quotas were set, and the data was weighted by area of the state, gender, age, and education. The survey's margin of error is  $\pm 2.0\%$  to  $\pm 3.3\%$  depending on how the response category percentages split for any given question.

### Is it Raining?

How aware Oregonians are of the current drought? Twenty-six percent (26%) of respondents reported that rainfall is at drought levels and an additional 38% report rainfall is a bit below normal. So, a majority of Oregonians are unaware of the drought, but 64% know that rainfall is below average.

Oregonians knowledge regarding rainfall is fairly stable across demographics. We do see some variance for age and county. Thirty-six percent (36%) of seniors (65 and older) were aware of the drought level rainfall, much higher than the 18% of young respondents (18-34 years old). Respondents in the Tri-County appear slightly less aware of the drought, only 23% reporting we are at drought level rainfall compared to 31% in the rest of the state and 26% in the Willamette Valley.

**Chart 1**  
**Oregon's Annual Rainfall**

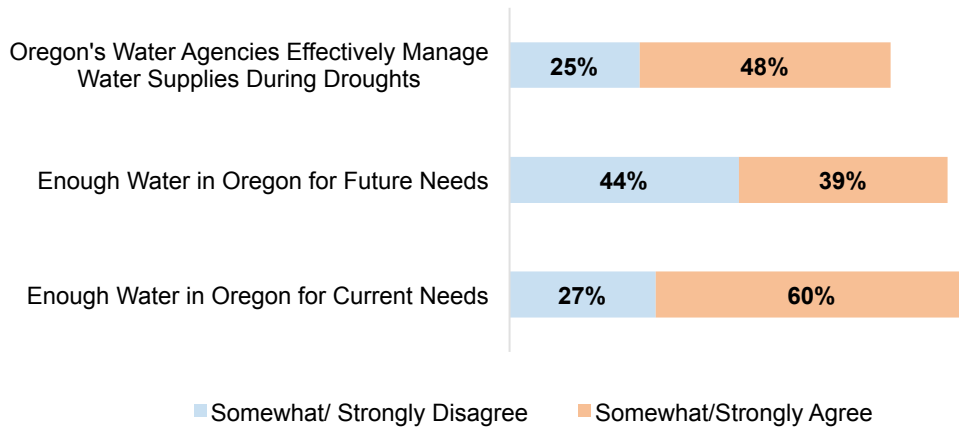


<sup>1</sup> The research was completed as a community service by DHM Research in partnership with the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. Both organizations are independent and non-partisan. DHM is a Certified B Corporation and OVBC is an Oregon charitable nonprofit corporation.

## Water Needs and Management

A majority of Oregonians, 60%, believe that we have enough water for our current needs. Oregonians are more divided over our future needs, with just 39% believing we have enough water for the future. Respondents tend to approve more than they disapprove of Oregon's management of water supplies during draughts, 48% approve and 25% disapprove. It appears that many respondents are unsure and not aware of how effective Oregon manages the water supply.

**Chart 2**  
**Oregon's Water Needs and Management**



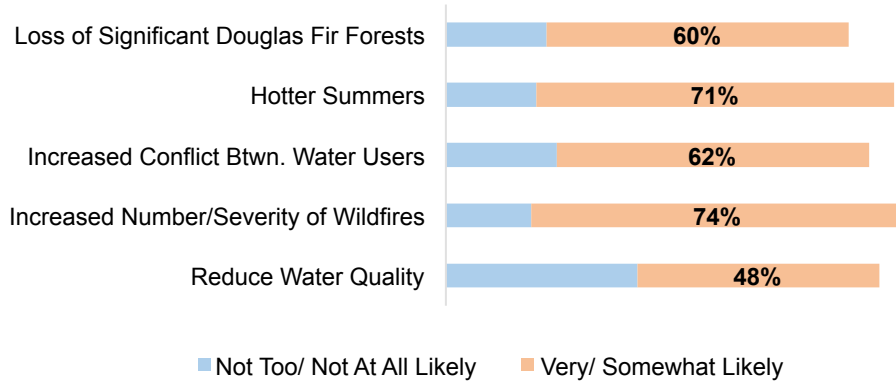
Republicans tend to report higher frequencies of having enough water for current and future needs (73% current and 57% for future) compared to Democrats (54% current and 26% future) and NAV/ Other (56% current and 40% future).

Perceptions of our current water needs tended to be divided by household income. Low-income respondents (under \$25,000 a year) reported we have enough water in 46% of cases, far less than the 70% reported by high-income respondents (over \$100,000 a year).

## Water Related Challenges Over Ten Years

Over the next 10 years, Oregonians expect to experience some water related challenges. A strong majority of respondents believe it is likely that Oregon will experience a loss of Douglas Firs (60%), hotter summers (71%), increased conflict between water users (62%), and an increase in the number and severity of wildfires (74%).

**Chart 3**  
**Changes in the Next Ten Years**



Oregonians judgements varied by respondents' age, education, and political affiliation. We averaged responses across the five topics for the demographics displayed below.

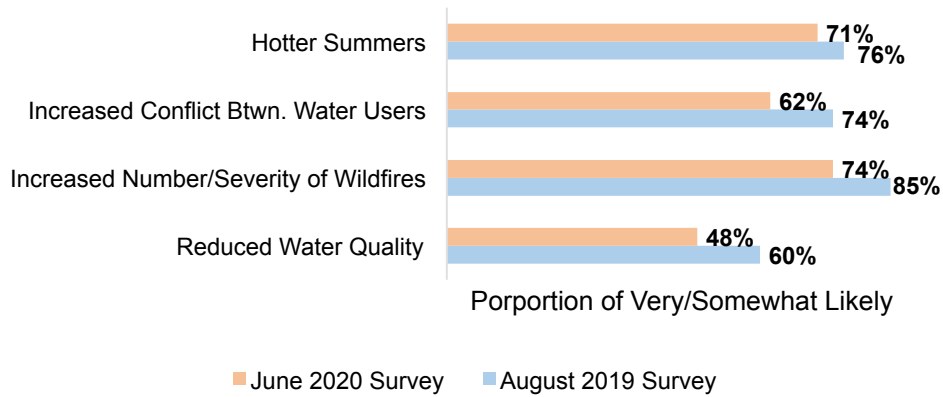
Average Likely/Somewhat Likely Scores Across Topics by Demographic							
	45-		University	High-School	Democrat	Republican	NAV/Othe
18-34	54	65+	Degree	Diploma	s	s	r
	55.8	68.2					
%	62%	%	74.4%	56.6%	76.0%	49.0%	62.6%

Younger individuals (mean=55.8%) tended to be less sure that the future would hold water challenges than older Oregonians (65 and older, mean=68.2%). We also see significant differences across education, with more educated respondents (mean=74.4% compared to mean=56.6%) expecting challenges more frequently. And, across political affiliation, Democrats frequently expect water challenges in the future (mean=76%), followed by NAV/Other (mean=62.6%), and Republicans (mean=49%).

### How Does This Compare to a Year Ago?

We asked the same questions in August of 2019. Although the results from this survey seem like Oregonians expect water challenges, the percentages fell across all topics. The most significant change is reduced water quality, falling from a strong majority of 60% in August 2019 to just 48% in June 2020.

**Chart 4**  
**Future Environmental Challenges:**  
**August 2019 Compared to June 2020**



The differences may arise for several reasons. Respondents in August 2019 were living in a very different world than in June 2020. In August 2019, respondents were in the middle of a very hot month when these issues may have seemed more prominent. In contrast, in June 2020, most respondents focus is likely on COVID-19 and the recent racism and police brutality protests. COVID-19 has also been beneficial to reduce CO2 emissions and increase environmentally sustainable behavior which may have made respondents more optimistic regarding water challenges of the future.

**Summary**

Oregonians are largely unaware that the state faces a drought, but a majority know that rainfall is below average. Still, most respondents feel we have enough water for our current needs, but they are less certain regarding our future needs. More generally, Oregonians appear more optimistic regarding future water related challenges in June 2020 than they were in August 2019. As discussed, this is likely due to respondent’s having very different focuses. It will be interesting to see how these opinions change as we move out of the shadows of COVID-19.

## Oregon Values and Belief Panel Survey

June 2020

N=900, ±2.0% to ±3.3%

51. Regarding Oregon's annual rainfall, which comes closest to your understanding?

Response category	n=900
Rainfall is much lower than normal, at drought levels	26%
Rainfall is a bit below normal	38%
Normal rainfall	22%
Above average rainfall	4%
Don't know	9%

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Response category	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
52. There is enough water in Oregon to meet <u>current</u> needs	20%	40%	19%	8%	13%
53. There is enough water in Oregon to meet <u>future</u> needs	12%	28%	27%	17%	17%
54. Oregon's water agencies effectively manage water supplies during droughts	13%	35%	15%	10%	27%

Thinking about the next ten years, how likely is it that Oregon will experience: **[Randomize]**

Response category	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not too likely	Not likely at all	Don't know
55. Reduced water quality	16%	32%	29%	9%	14%
56. Increased number and severity of wildfires	35%	39%	13%	4%	10%
57. Increased conflict between water users	29%	33%	17%	5%	17%
58. Hotter summers	38%	33%	14%	4%	11%
59. Loss of significant Douglas fir forests from drought and heat	25%	35%	15%	5%	20%