CUSTOMER NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2024

Rainbow Water District
A History of Reliable Water and Responsive Service!

75 YEARS OF SERVICE

The District's mission has always directed us to provide responsive service and find the best solutions and outcomes for safe and reliable water needs now and in the future. On August 22 your Rainbow Water District will celebrate the 75th anniversary of our founding. We have some fun events and prize drawings in the works to celebrate this summer. Stay tuned!

NORTH SPRINGFIELD WATER SUPPLY

Springfield Utility Board (SUB) is investing in new water supply facilities that will eventually allow SUB to supply the majority of water to North Springfield, water currently provided by Rainbow and sold to SUB for use by City customers under a wholesale purchase agreement. Rainbow will still provide water for our own customers after SUB's new water treatment plant is operational.

Lane County voters formed Rainbow Water District in 1949 to supply water to north and west Springfield and voted again to form the McKenzie Highway Water District in 1950 to supply east Springfield. The two utilities worked closely together and partnered to drill the first wells in the Weyerhaeuser Wellfield in 1956. (Springfield Utility Board later acquired the assets of the McKenzie Highway Water District in 1960.)

As the community grew, Rainbow continued to have responsibility for supplying areas of north and west Springfield. In the 1960s Rainbow developed our Chase Wellfield, and in the 1970s we added source capacity with two wells near Interstate 5 and one well located along Q Street.

Drilling of our I-5 Well #1 was completed on April 26, 1974, so about the time you are reading this one of our newest wells is celebrating a 50th birthday! I-5 Well #2 was completed January 21, 1975. These two wells have been the workhorses that have allowed the North Gateway business parks and commercial areas to develop over these past five decades.

During the January 2024 ice storm, we were fortunate that EWEB's power feed to these two wells stayed intact and the wells were able to keep running and supply about 2,300 gallons per minute to keep businesses and essential facilities like PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Center (RiverBend Hospital) in operation.

Interstate 5 Well #2

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WATER TREATMENT INVESTMENTS

As we reported last July, a benefit of operating a network of wells is that the water supply is distributed to all parts of the water system. However, a downside is that new treatment requirements must be implemented at multiple locations. On April 16, the US EPA finalized a new drinking water regulation for PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances). The PFAS term applies to a large group of human-made chemicals used worldwide since the 1940s to make many water-resistant, stain-repellant, non-stick products and some firefighting foams. PFAS have been used in outdoor clothing, carpeting, upholstery, non-stick cookware, food packaging, and other common household products. The thousands of different PFAS are often referred to as "forever chemicals" because they do not break down easily and can remain in the environment, including groundwater, for a long time.

The April 2024 final rule sets the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for six PFAS compounds, with limits for PFOS and PFOA, the two most widespread compounds, set at 4 parts per trillion (ppt). Tests of District wells have detected PFAS at levels ranging from 0 ppt (not detected) to 16 ppt, which is above the new limit. The EPA is giving water providers until April 2027 to complete initial monitoring of their drinking water, and until April 2029 to achieve compliance by implementing measures that treat or otherwise alleviate levels that are above the limits.

PFAS chemicals are widespread in the environment and have been found in the drinking water supplies of millions of Americans—including here in Rainbow Water District. PFAS are commonly found near sites where industrial or consumer products with PFAS have been made or used. However, there is no known or apparent source for the PFAS found in the District wells, and we might be experiencing background levels from common household products. Rainbow is not waiting until 2029 or even 2027 to start addressing the problem. Steps being taken by the District to address PFAS contamination and continue to operate a reliable system include:

- ✓ We applied for and received two grants, hiring an engineering consultant last July to evaluate the feasibility of adding treatment to existing facilities and performing two pilot studies of specific treatment equipment, and we are launching a new study to determine levels of PFAS in our soil and water to consider possible modifications to existing wells.
- ✓ We continue to collect water samples from District wells for analysis by a certified lab.
- ✓ We anticipate that modifications to existing facilities will cost millions of dollars, exhausting our reserve funds. The Board has started raising rates to generate additional revenue for installing treatment systems. We are also seeking other grants and have joined with other water utilities in litigation against manufacturers of PFAS to seek financial recovery.

More information:

US Environmental Protection Agency: Meaningful and Achievable Steps You Can Take to Reduce Your Risk
(https://www.epa.gov/pfas/meaningful-and-achievable-steps-you-can-take-reduce-your-risk)

Oregon Health Authority Drinking Water Services: PFAS
(https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/DRINKINGWATER/OPERATIONS/Pages/PFAS.aspx)

Department of Environmental Quality-Addressing PFAS in Oregon
(https://www.oregon.gov/deq/Hazards-and-Cleanup/ToxicReduction/Pages/PFAs-in-Oregon.aspx)