

Public Acceptance and Public Involvement for Water Reuse in Corvallis, Oregon

Karen DuBose, Oregon State University, Water Resources Graduate Program

Changing water quality regulations on the Willamette River are causing the city of Corvallis, Oregon to consider water reuse as an alternative to discharging treated wastewater into the river. Water authorities need to understand public attitudes toward reclaimed water and use that information to design effective public involvement processes. To assist Corvallis in doing this, a survey was designed to assess the public's level of knowledge and acceptance of reclaimed water, and interviews of other water reuse programs were done to identify successful methods of public involvement.

Survey respondents were generally more accepting of uses in which they could expect a low degree of contact with the water and less accepting of high contact uses. Gender, age, education, awareness of water quality problems, respondents' personal sustainability ethic, the presence of children in the household, and trust in the utility to serve public interest were found to influence respondents' acceptance of various uses of reclaimed water. Interview results indicate that the most successful programs involved the public very early in the process and were comprehensive in nature. Providing access to the decision-making process is critical to the success of a public involvement program. Information should be provided to the public in as many forms as possible. Above all, the city should keep the process transparent and make a special effort to incorporate comments and suggestions from the public into the final plan. While this study was primarily designed to support Corvallis' public involvement planning efforts, it can also serve as a model for other water utilities in the Pacific Northwest and in the United States as they pursue their own water reuse programs.

Karen DuBose

Karen DuBose recently graduated from Oregon State University with an M.S. in Water Resources Policy and Management. Her research focused on reclaimed water and public outreach. Before returning to school, she worked with King County in biosolids management. Her background includes natural resource management, environmental science, and soil science.