

FORFEITURE OF WATER RIGHTS**540.610 Use as measure of water right; presumption of forfeiture of right for nonuse; basis for rebutting presumption; confirmation of rights of municipalities.**

(1) Beneficial use shall be the basis, the measure and the limit of all rights to the use of water in this state. Whenever the owner of a perfected and developed water right ceases or fails to use all or part of the water appropriated for a period of five successive years, the failure to use shall establish a rebuttable presumption of forfeiture of all or part of the water right.

(2) Upon a showing of failure to use beneficially for five successive years, the appropriator has the burden of rebutting the presumption of forfeiture by showing one or more of the following:

(a) The water right is for use of water, or rights of use, acquired by cities and towns in this state, by appropriation or by purchase, for all reasonable and usual municipal purposes.

(b) A finding of forfeiture would impair the rights of such cities and towns to the use of water, whether acquired by appropriation or purchase, or heretofore recognized by act of the legislature, or which may hereafter be acquired.

(c) The use of water, or rights of use, are appurtenant to property obtained by the Department of Veterans' Affairs under ORS 407.135 or 407.145 for three years after the expiration of redemptions as provided in ORS 18.568 to 18.598 while the land is held by the Director of Veterans' Affairs, even if during such time the water is not used for a period of more than five successive years.

(d) The use of water, or rights of use, under a water right, if the owner of the property to which the right is appurtenant is unable to use the water due to economic hardship as defined by rule by the Water Resources Commission.

(e) The period of nonuse occurred during a period of time within which land was withdrawn from use in accordance with the Act of Congress of May 28, 1956, chapter 327 (7 U.S.C. 1801-1814; 1821-1824; 1831-1837), or the Federal Conservation Reserve Program, Act of Congress of December 23, 1985, chapter 198 (16 U.S.C. 3831-3836, 3841-3845). If necessary, in a cancellation proceeding under this section, the water right holder rebutting the presumption under this paragraph shall provide documentation that the water right holder's land was withdrawn from use under a federal reserve program.

(f) The end of the alleged period of nonuse occurred more than 15 years before the date upon which evidence of nonuse was

submitted to the commission or the commission initiated cancellation proceedings under ORS 540.631, whichever occurs first.

(g) The owner of the property to which the water right was appurtenant is unable to use the water because the use of water under the right is discontinued under an order of the commission under ORS 537.775.

(h) The nonuse occurred during a period of time within which the water right holder was using reclaimed water in lieu of using water under an existing water right.

(i) The nonuse occurred during a period of time within which the water right holder was reusing water through land application as authorized by ORS 537.141 (1)(i) or 537.545 (1)(g) in lieu of using water under an existing water right.

(j) The owner or occupant of the property to which the water right is appurtenant was unable to make full beneficial use of the water because water was not available. A water right holder rebutting the presumption under this paragraph shall provide evidence that the water right holder was ready, willing and able to use the water had it been available.

(k) The holder of a water right is prohibited by law from using the water. If the prohibition is subject to remedial action that would allow the use of the water, the water right holder shall provide evidence that the water right holder is conducting the remedial action with reasonable diligence.

(L) The nonuse occurred during a period of time within which the exercise of all or part of the water right was not necessary due to climatic conditions, so long as the water right holder had a facility capable of handling the full allowed rate and duty, and was otherwise ready, willing and able to use the entire amount of water allowed under the water right.

(m) The nonuse occurred during a period of time within which the water was included in a transfer application pending before the Water Resources Department.

(3) Notwithstanding subsection (1) of this section, if the owner of a perfected and developed water right uses less water to accomplish the beneficial use allowed by the right, the right is not subject to forfeiture so long as:

(a) The user has a facility capable of handling the entire rate and duty authorized under the right; and

(b) The user is otherwise ready, willing and able to make full use of the right.

(4) The right of all cities and towns in this state to acquire rights to the use of the water of natural streams and lakes, not otherwise appropriated, and subject to existing

rights, for all reasonable and usual municipal purposes, and for such future reasonable and usual municipal purposes as may reasonably be anticipated by reason of growth of population, or to secure sufficient water supply in cases of emergency, is expressly confirmed.

(5) After a water right is forfeited under subsection (1) of this section, the water that was the subject of use shall revert to the public and become again the subject of appropriation in the manner provided by law, subject to existing priorities. [Amended by 1985 c.689 §5; 1987 c.339 §4; 1989 c.699 §1; 1989 c.833 §61a; 1991 c.370 §6; 1995 c.356 §2; 1995 c.366 §1; 1997 c.42 §5; 1997 c.244 §5; 1997 c.283 §1; 1999 c.335 §3; 1999 c.804 §§3,4]

540.612 Exemption from forfeiture for right subject to petition filed under ORS 540.574. If a district, as defined in ORS 540.505, petitions for a transfer as provided in ORS 540.574 no later than the end of the calendar year of the fifth year of nonuse under ORS 540.610 (1), the forfeiture provisions of ORS 540.610 shall not apply to the lands from which the water right is sought to be transferred pending approval of the district's petition. The time required for the processing of the petition, including any time required for hearings, appeals and completion of an authorized change, shall not be included when computing a five-year period of nonuse under the provisions of ORS 540.610 (1). [1991 c.957 §11]

540.615 [1961 c.140 §1; 1987 c.339 §5; repealed by 1989 c.699 §4]

540.620 [Repealed by 1955 c.671 §1]

540.621 Cancellation of abandoned water right upon request of owner. Whenever the owner of a perfected and developed water right certifies under oath to the Water Resources Commission that the water right has been abandoned by the owner and that the owner desires cancellation thereof, the commission shall enter an order canceling the water right. Effective upon the date of the entering of such order, the water which was the subject of use under the water right shall revert to the public and become again the subject of appropriation in the manner provided by law, subject to existing priorities. [1955 c.670 §1; 1979 c.67 §5; 1985 c.673 §96]

540.630 [Repealed by 1955 c.671 §1]

540.631 Notice by Water Resources Commission of initiation of proceedings to cancel forfeited water right. Whenever it appears to the satisfaction of the Water Resources Commission upon the commission's own determination or upon evidence submitted to the commission by any person that a perfected and developed water right has been forfeited as provided in ORS 540.610 (1), and would not be rebutted under ORS 540.610 (2), the commission shall initiate proceedings for the cancellation of such wa-

ter right by causing written notice of such initiation of proceedings to be given by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested, to the legal owner of the lands to which the water right is appurtenant and to the occupant of such lands. The notice to the legal owner shall be addressed to the legal owner at the owner's last address of record in the office of the county assessor of the county in which the lands are located. The notice shall contain a complete description of the water right and of the lands to which the water right is appurtenant. The notice shall state that the legal owner or the occupant has a period of 60 days from the date of the mailing of the notice within which to protest the proposed cancellation of the water right. [1955 c.670 §2; 1985 c.673 §97; 1989 c.699 §2; 1991 c.249 §53]

540.640 [Repealed by 1955 c.671 §1]

540.641 Cancellation if no protest; procedure for cancellation if owner or occupant files protest. (1) If the legal owner or the occupant receiving notice as provided in ORS 540.631 fails to protest the proposed cancellation of the water right within the 60-day period prescribed in the notice, the Water Resources Commission may enter an order canceling the water right.

(2) If the legal owner or the occupant receiving notice as provided in ORS 540.631 files a protest against the proposed cancellation of the water right with the commission within the 60-day period prescribed in the notice, the commission shall fix a time and place for a hearing on the protest. The commission shall cause written notice of the hearing to be given at least 10 days prior to the hearing to the person protesting the cancellation of the water right and to any other person who in the opinion of the commission is an interested party to the proceeding. The hearing shall be held by the commission and shall be conducted under the provisions of ORS chapter 183 pertaining to contested cases. After the hearing the commission shall enter an order canceling the water right, canceling in part or modifying the water right, or declaring that the water right shall not be canceled or modified. [1955 c.670 §3; 1975 c.581 §26c; 1983 c.807 §3; 1985 c.673 §98]

540.650 Issuance of new water right certificate for water rights not canceled. If the order of the Water Resources Commission or the final decree on the appeal therefrom under ORS 540.641 cancels in part or modifies the water right, that portion of the water right not canceled or continued as modified shall be reaffirmed by a new water right certificate issued by the commission. Such certificate shall be of the same character as that described in ORS 539.140. The

certificate shall be recorded and transmitted to the owner of the water right as provided in ORS 539.140. [1955 c.670 §4; 1979 c.67 §6; 1985 c.673 §99]

540.660 Affidavit of watermaster that circumstances prevent use of water right in accordance with terms of certificate; procedures for cancellation of right. (1) If a watermaster has reason to believe that circumstances exist that prevent a water right from being exercised according to the terms and conditions of the water right certificate issued under ORS 537.250 or 539.140, such as the land to which the water right is appurtenant is covered by an impermeable surface, or the diversion mechanism used to appropriate water under a water right is no longer operable, the watermaster shall file an affidavit with the Water Resources Director. The affidavit shall state that to the best of the watermaster's knowledge, there is no physical way the water may be applied to a beneficial use in accordance with the terms and conditions of the water right certificate.

(2) If the watermaster files an affidavit under subsection (1) of this section each year for five consecutive years, the affidavits shall constitute prima facie evidence that the water has not been applied to a beneficial use for five years and the Water Resources Commission shall initiate proceedings under ORS 540.631 to cancel the water right.

(3) The Water Resources Department shall provide notice of the affidavit filed with the Water Resources Director under subsection (1) of this section. The department shall provide such notice in the following manner:

(a) If there are 25 or fewer record owners of the land, the department shall mail a copy of the affidavit to each record owner.

(b) If there are more than 25 record owners, the department shall provide general notice by publication according to the procedures established in ORS 193.010 to 193.100.

(c) If the land is within the boundaries of an irrigation district, the department shall mail a copy of the affidavit to the irrigation district.

(4) As used in this section, "record owner" means the person shown as the owner of the land in the county deed records established under ORS chapter 93. [1987 c.339 §1]

540.670 Effect of cancellation of primary water right on supplemental right; change from supplemental to primary right; priority date. (1) The cancellation of a primary water right for nonuse under ORS 540.641 shall not also cancel a supplemental water right unless the supplemental water right also has not been used beneficially for five or more years.

(2) If the Water Resources Commission cancels a primary water right under ORS 540.641 the commission may issue a new water right certificate changing the supplemental water right to a primary right if the commission finds that the change would not result in injury to existing water rights.

(3) A supplemental right changed to a primary right under subsection (2) of this section shall retain the priority date of the supplemental right. [1987 c.339 §2]

PROHIBITED ACTS; INJUNCTIONS

540.710 Interference with headgate, or use of water denied by watermaster or other authority; evidence of guilt. No person shall willfully open, close, change or interfere with any lawfully established headgate or water box without authority, or willfully use water or conduct water into or through the ditch of the person which has been lawfully denied the person by the watermaster or other competent authority. The possession or use of water when the same shall have been lawfully denied by the watermaster or other competent authority shall be prima facie evidence of the guilt of the person using it.

540.720 Unauthorized use or waste of water; evidence of guilt of user. No person shall use without authorization water to which another person is entitled, or willfully waste water to the detriment of another. The possession or use of such water without legal right shall be prima facie evidence of the guilt of the person using it.

540.730 Obstruction interfering with use of works or access thereto prohibited. Whenever any appropriator of water has the lawful right of way for the storage, diversion, or carriage of water, no person shall place or maintain any obstruction that shall interfere with the use of the works, or prevent convenient access thereto.

540.740 Injunctive relief against action of watermaster. Any person who may be injured by the action of any watermaster may appeal to the circuit court for an injunction. The injunction shall only be issued in case it can be shown at the hearing that the watermaster has failed to carry into effect the order of the Water Resources Commission or decrees of the court determining the existing rights to the use of water. [Amended by 1985 c.673 §100]

540.750 Injunction suits; notice and hearing to authorize restraining order; time of hearing. In suits for injunction affecting the use of water from streams upon which the rights to water have been determined, no restraining order shall be granted before hearing had after at least three days'