

WATER, WASTEWATER, BROADBAND PLANNING CONTEXT

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Marion County +
Mid-Willamette
Valley Council of
Governments

Key Findings / Takeaways

- The Santiam Canyon watershed plays an important role in providing clean drinking water for over 225,000 Oregonians. The state's water quality standards are established by the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission through administrative rulemaking. The "**Three Basin Rule**" (<https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/viewSingleRule.action?ruleVrsnRsn=68965>), Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) 340-041-0350, first adopted by the commission in 1977, set out to "preserve or improve the existing high-quality water for municipal water supplies, recreation, and preservation of aquatic life" of the Clackamas, McKenzie and North Santiam Rivers.
- For centuries, the waters of the Santiam Canyon have provided for human habitation and natural functions. The water resources of the canyon now support residents, business and industry, recreational experiences and tourism, connections to tribal and cultural heritage, electricity generation, agricultural irrigation, as well as the natural environmental functions, both within the canyon and downstream.
- The proposed North Santiam Joint Wastewater Project, managed by the North Santiam Sewer Authority, would connect the incorporated communities in the Santiam Canyon via a network of shared sewer facilities and reduce the risk of toxic septic overflow into the basin. Availability of wastewater treatment facilities would also significantly increase the opportunity for growth in population base and economic development in the area.

Existing Plans, Policies, Projects, or Funding

Pre-disaster

- **Marion County Broadband Initiative** (2018) (<https://www.co.marion.or.us/CS/EconomicDevelopment/Pages/Broadband-Initiative-.aspx>) - In 2018, the county hired a consultant team to develop a countywide broadband strategy to improve broadband access, reliability, and affordability, particularly in rural communities. The effort included community outreach and focus groups with businesses in Santiam Canyon to understand more the role broadband plays in business innovation and growth in the area.

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- **North Santiam Canyon Regional Land Inventory (2017)**
<https://www.co.marion.or.us/CS/EconomicDevelopment/Documents/Maul%20Foster%20%20Alongi%20FINAL%202017.01.09%20NSC%20Land%20Inventory%20Summary%20Report.pdf> - Regional land inventory and redevelopment analysis conducted parallel with the preliminary feasibility analysis of a regional sewer system for the canyon and a regional health impact analysis completed by the Oregon Health Authority. The outcome of the three studies summarized the conditions for economic growth in the canyon and potential for a joint wastewater treatment facility. Notably, a recommendation of the study was the need for a 'rural regional visioning' process to work with community members to establish a unified, long-range vision for growth in the canyon.
- **Importance of Water in the North Santiam Basin: An Economic Description (2019)** https://northsantiam.org/wp-content/uploads/Economic-Importance-of-Water-in-NSW_FINAL_2019.pdf - In 2018 The North Santiam Watershed Council and Oregon Business Council commissioned ECONorthwest, an economics consulting firm, to compile information and study water rights / use, policies, and explore investment and management that may be needed to secure water availability and quality into the future. The study also calculated the value of the water from multiple angles, including cultural and tribal use, electricity generation, recreation, and agriculture, among others.
- **Sanitary Survey of On-Site Disposal Systems in Detroit and Idanha (2003)** - The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality entered into a partnership with the cities of Detroit and Idanha to assist in conducting a sanitary survey to document failing on-site sewage disposal systems.
- **North Santiam Joint Wastewater Project**
<http://www.northsantiamsewer.net/> - The cities of Detroit, Gates, and Idanha rely on individual septic systems while Mill City maintains a STEP sewer system. For many years, Marion County, the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments (MWVCOG), and the communities of Detroit, Gates, Idanha, and Mill City have been in discussions regarding the governance and feasibility of developing a watershed-wide wastewater system. "North Santiam Joint Wastewater Project" would significantly reduce the risk of toxic septic overflow into the basin and also increase the opportunity for a more robust economic recovery in the area (as determined in the Regional Land Inventory and the **2017 Regional Wastewater Analysis** <https://www.co.marion.or.us/CS/EconomicDevelopment/Documents/Keller%20Associates-NSC%20-%20Regional%20Wastewater%20Analysis%201-12-17.pdf>). The wildfire has brought additional urgency and renewed momentum for the wastewater project, in part because many of the impacted properties may be unable to secure permits for new septic system installations.

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- **North Santiam Canyon Economic Opportunity Study (2014)**
<https://www.mwvcog.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?cdm-download-file-id=NDV8MjAxNS0wOC0yNyAxMDoyNToyM3xuc2MtZW9zLWRyYWZ0LXBsYW4tOS4yNS5wZGY> - The primary purpose of an Economic Opportunity Analysis is to inventory employment lands available for development or redevelopment and ensure a 20-year supply of employment land for a region. The EOA also includes a summary analysis of economic strengths and opportunities for the region.

Over the years, studies have been undertaken to determine the feasibility and design of a wastewater system to meet the individual needs of these canyon communities. Below is a list of the known wastewater studies to-date.

- *Detroit/Idanha*
 - *Detroit-Idanha VE Study Conceptual Design Review, 2002*
 - *Detroit-Idanha WW Facilities Pre-Design Report 2001*
 - *Detroit-Idanha WWTF & Sewerage Collection System Improvements, 2001*
 - *Sanitary Survey of On-Site Sewage Disposal Systems – Detroit & Idanha, 2003*
 - *Upper North Santiam River Canyon Sewage Treatment Feasibility Study, 1996*
- *Detroit*
 - *Detroit Wastewater Feasibility Study, 2015*
- *Idanha*
 - *Idanha Wastewater Facility Plan Update, 2008/2009*
- *Gates*
 - *Sanitary Survey, 1999*
- *Lyons-Mehama*
 - *Lyons Sanitary Sewerage Plan, 1988*
 - *Lyons Sanitary Sewerage Feasibility Analysis & Plan Update, 1995*
- *Mill City*
 - *Sanitary Sewer System Improvements, 2008*
 - *Sewage Collection System, 1990*
 - *Wastewater Treatment Plant, 1990*
 - *O&M Manual Collection, 2010*
 - *O&M Manual Treatment, 1994*

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Post-Disaster

- Planning efforts documented in the 2017 wastewater analysis and land inventory reports are being advanced through recovery efforts, to develop a North Santiam Joint Sewer Master Plan and subsequent Wastewater Treatment Facility Plan(s). Master planning paves the way for funding acquisition, and design and construction.
 - Extensive data analysis is currently underway for the North Santiam Sewer Master Plan. The Master Plan is expected be on the North Santiam Sewer Authority's agenda for September 2, 2021. Once approved, the plan will be presented to the affected city councils and community groups.
- In July of 2021, the State of Oregon's Wildfire Recovery Funding Program (HB 3127 and 5006) awarded the following to support the Santiam Canyon infrastructure projects:
 - The City of Detroit received \$3.5M for a permanent water system.
 - Marion County received \$50M toward the North Santiam Canyon Sewer and Septic Project (this funding addresses about 40% of the estimated cost to develop the wastewater project).
 - Project A: Cities of Gates and Mill City - \$40 million for constructing new and increased capacity sewer infrastructure for the City of Gates, linking to Mill City.
 - Project B: Cities of Detroit and Idanha - \$10 million for interim septic measures and further engineering and testing.

Opportunities for Recovery

- Prior to the fire there was expressed interest for developing a resilient and long-term wastewater solution. The fires further damaged the existing septic systems, making proper waste treatment options to protect the Basin Area and Watershed more urgent.
- Post-fire, coordinated and regional improvements to infrastructure, housing development (outside of flood and landslide zones, constructed to code and with more fire resilient materials) and aligned economic development efforts are possible – this is due to the large amount of state and federal funding available for wildfire recovery that otherwise would not be in play.
- Santiam Canyon will benefit from the increased economic and housing development opportunities that can be realized with the wastewater project - drainfield size would no longer be a factor nor will expensive septic systems be necessary. The wastewater project would also serve to expand opportunities for recreation and tourism, as safe treatment will allow for a higher number of users.

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Recommendations

- The wildfires have affected how residents and businesses of the Canyon think about their future and have had implications for the growth assumptions built into pre-disaster plans and policies. As recommended in the 2017 Regional Land Inventory, the Santiam Canyon would benefit from a visioning process whereby community members could define their long-range goals for development and economic growth. The wildfires have further necessitated such a community-led effort to confirm common values and establish ideals for the future that can guide rebuilding and recovery efforts.
- Bolstering and expanding the broadband and communications infrastructure in the canyon is needed now more than ever. These systems serve not only to support economic activity, they are also critical for emergency response, education, and employment.