

## CUSTOMER NEWSLETTER – JULY 2023

Last week we mailed an important letter from the Board of Commissioners to every Rainbow customer. This newsletter provides some additional information.



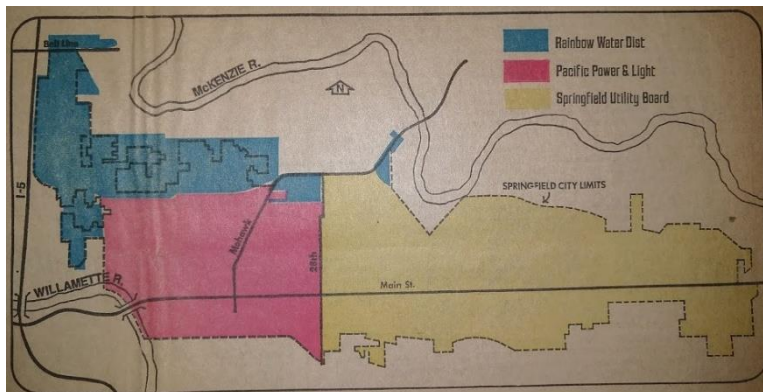
### 75 YEARS OF SERVICE

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, 2023, your Rainbow Water District will celebrate its 74<sup>th</sup> birthday. We'll organize a few special events to mark this milestone with you over this next 75th Anniversary year.

### 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. Rainbow will still provide water for our own customers. Here's some background on the history of water supply serving North Springfield and what is planned for the future.

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.



1971 Register Guard Article

The Springfield Utility Board, or SUB, grew out of a 1949 City of Springfield charter amendment authorizing the City Council to “acquire and operate an electric light and power system.” After starting as an electric utility, in 1960 SUB acquired the McKenzie Highway Water District and rights to half the water from the Weyerhaeuser Wellfield. SUB first began operating a water system east of 28<sup>th</sup> Street.

Rainbow's wells have provided water for Springfield's customers in North Springfield. Since 1971, for over 50 years, Rainbow has operated under formalized agreements with SUB and the City of Springfield to provide water to a portion of the city in addition to our own customers.

Rainbow's customer base has remained stable for three decades while the city around us has grown significantly. Rainbow has been selling our excess water to SUB, but with the city poised to develop Glenwood and the Jasper-Natron and North Gateway Urban Growth Boundary expansion areas, it has become necessary for SUB to diversify its supply and invest in a large water treatment plant that can provide Springfield with a reliable and resilient source of water for the next 50 years.

With SUB's investment in new water supply facilities, Springfield's need to draw upon Rainbow's system will decrease significantly. Rainbow and SUB are developing new operating agreements that will take us into the future. Rainbow's sources will still contribute to the overall water supply, taking care of our own Rainbow customers and helping meet regional peak demands or providing a backup during emergencies, but Rainbow will not be able to sell our surplus water to the extent that we have for decades. Rainbow will experience a loss of income even as we face some challenging and costly new treatment requirements.

## **WATER TREATMENT INVESTMENTS**

A benefit of operating a network of wells is that the water supply is distributed to all parts of the water system. For example, a power outage or other equipment failure at one well does not mean the whole system is without water. However, a proposed new federal drinking water regulation could impact multiple well locations, making it more difficult to reliably operate the system.

The new drinking water regulation is 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.

PFAS chemicals are widespread in the environment. Now, they have been found in the drinking water supplies of millions of Americans—including 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.

Oregon has non-regulatory drinking water health advisory levels for PFAS. The levels of PFAS chemicals found in several District wells are below Oregon's health advisory level.

In March 2023, EPA proposed a National Primary Drinking Water Regulation for PFAS known to occur in drinking water. The proposed rule does not require any action until finalized, but if approved would set enforceable levels of PFAS in drinking water. The proposed rule sets the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for PFOS and PFOA compounds at 4 parts per trillion (ppt). This number is so small, it is the equivalent of just 4 seconds in 32,000 years. Tests of District wells show PFAS levels from 0 ppt (not detected) to 16 ppt, which is above the proposed limit. The new proposed levels are considered draft and subject to change. More should be known by December 2023.

Rainbow is not waiting for the EPA to finalize the new rules. Steps being taken by the District to address PFAS contamination and continue to operate a reliable system include:

- ✓ We have been awarded a study grant of \$19,500 for an engineering consultant to look at our existing facilities and estimate what modifications are possible and at what cost to add the ability to treat for PFAS.
- ✓ We are taking regular water samples from all District wells and sending these to a lab for analysis.
- ✓ Our team is currently investigating possible sources of contamination.

We anticipate that modifications to existing facilities will likely cost millions of dollars, exhausting our reserve funds. The Board has decided to start raising rates now.

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>)

## **WATER RATE INCREASES**

Money to fund our water operations comes from your monthly water bills. The *base rate* portion of the bill covers costs that are fixed no matter how much water is used. Another portion of the bill, though, varies based on the amount of water *usage*. The more water people use, the more our wells run requiring Rainbow to pay more for electricity, treatment chemicals and equipment maintenance. To account for these variable costs, the District has a three-tiered water usage rate that rewards customers for conservation. Tier 1 covers a customer's normal water use up to 25 units. Customers who use more than 25 units pay the higher Tier 2 & Tier 3 rates per unit of water.

Like other water utilities, the District has found it necessary to periodically raise rates to cover the cost of services provided and keep up with inflation costs. In December 2022 the Consumer Price Index increased 6.1%. This amount provided our Board of Commissioners and Budget Committee with a starting point to prepare a budget. A higher rate increase was selected to allow a portion of our revenue to be saved for later. In June 2023, the Board determined to raise the base rate from \$20 to \$23 per month and the Tier 1 Usage from \$1.40/unit to \$1.61 per unit—an average of \$5.50 per household per month. Usage rates for Tiers 2 and 3 will also increase.

This action allows us to start saving in our reserve funds to meet future needs and reduce the possibility that we will need to take out loans and pay interest on borrowed money. Half of the increase will be applied to the base rate, and the other half to the usage rate.

Annual rate increases are anticipated until we are adequately prepared for future costs.

The bill of an average water customer using 12 units of water will increase from \$36.80 to \$42.30 per month In July 2023.

## INFORMATION UPDATES – [www.rwdonline.net](http://www.rwdonline.net)

It is important to us that we communicate with our customers. We want to be transparent and let you know what changes are coming and provide as much detail as possible as we learn and have accurate information to share.

We upgraded our website to enable us to provide much more detail and give us the ability to provide more frequent updates. Customers may sign up for important alerts or contact the staff or board members electronically. There is more information about PFAS with links to related articles. We are also providing information about our electronic payment portal, customer service procedures, and some of our most Frequently Asked Questions, or FAQs.

## WATER QUALITY REPORTS

Rainbow's **Annual Water Quality Report**, which summarizes the results of our water testing with data from 2022, is available online. You may view the report under our website's Water Quality menu, or by at this URL: <https://www.rwdonline.net/files/e87389fd9/2022+RWD+CCR+FINAL.pdf>

*Rainbow is happy to offer various levels of service in support of smaller neighboring water systems. Each of these water systems have their own governing board and their own water sources, but Rainbow helps prepare the Annual Water Quality Reports unique to each system. If you are one of our contract district customers, your annual report was sent directly to you by paper mail or email.*

Rainbow's office hours are 8 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday. You may call us at 541-746-1676 or reach us by email at [office@RWDonline.net](mailto:office@RWDonline.net) with questions or if you need assistance of any kind including to request a paper copy of the water quality report. If you call after business hours, you may leave a message or our answering service will route emergencies to our on call operator. We have a mail slot at our office for overnight payments.

With the arrival of summer we have resumed posting *Weekly Watering Recommendations*.

Find us on the web at [RWDonline.net](http://RWDonline.net) or use the [Facebook](#) link for Rainbow-Water-District.

It is our desire to provide you with Reliable Water & Responsive Service for years to come!