



Fiscal Year 2024-25 Budget Message

The permit that established the Corbett Water District is dated September 2, 1932 and signed by District Commissioners A.G. Salzman and Frank G. Bell. The official water rights for our District were designated on July 5, 1933. Since that time, the District has seen many changes, though not as many as one might think, considering we are nearing the milestone of providing 100 years of safe, clean drinking water.

The system was originally designed to route water from the North Fork of Gordon Creek into a nearby Treatment Plant that filtered and purified the creek water. Our water is now sourced from both the North and South Forks of Gordon Creek. Water is transported roughly two miles to our Treatment Plant, which was built in the 1980s, and consists of three filter ponds, a clear well, and a one-million-gallon reservoir. The District has four other reservoirs located throughout the system, with a storage capacity of 1.95 million gallons.

The Corbett Water District filters our water using a slow sand filtration process. The water is fed to a filter pond, where layers of sand and gravel filter out debris and organisms. We add sodium hypochlorite (chlorine) at a rate of one milligram per liter to disinfect the water. This ensures that harmful bacteria and organisms have been eliminated, and the water is safe to drink. Because of the acidic nature of our surface water, soda ash is added to raise the pH, and adjust alkalinity level. This reduces corrosion in our main lines, the metal surfaces of the reservoirs, and customer pipes. Both processes meet State and Federal drinking water standards.

At the Treatment Plant we use a computer to monitor the temperature, turbidity (clarity), amount of chlorine, and pH of the water. We maintain levels based on State and Federal regulations. We also monitor flow in and out of the Treatment Plant. The computers are set to specific limits which alert our staff (both day and night) to any number of potential issues. All of our customers live below our Treatment Plant, and energy efficient, gravity-fed pipes fill with the pressure of built-up water, which flows down Larch Mountain, and then pushes up and over hills and into roughly 1080 businesses and homes.

Like many other water utilities, we have struggled to find certified, experienced workers. This year has been an exciting time, bringing energetic positive team members onboard, who are ready to learn. Learning takes money and time, and this budget reflects the industry-wide pressure that districts feel to find, train, and retain talent. Over the last 3 years as budget officer, I have attempted to update and improve the working environment at the District. We've made progress working on building improvements every year. The roofs of the barn and the office building were repaired, we replaced the oil furnace with a heat pump, and have begun an internal remodel that includes a lunchroom, locker room, and smaller private manager's office. We want the Corbett Water District to be the best in the business, and we want the staff to feel that working here is a privilege (just like living here).

We currently do not have an on-site Direct Responsible Charge (DRC), which can be a hindrance when attempting to solve problems in an emergency. The DRC is accountable for decisions relating to treatment processes, water quality, and water quantity that may affect public health. I am increasing the Salaried positions in the budget to include space for either a very qualified District Manager/DRC, or a part time experienced utility worker who could serve as DRC and work with the District Manager.

Aside from training new staff, the theme of the past 6 months has been maintenance, maintenance, maintenance. As we do work in the system, we find problems that have been ignored or parts that are at the end of their useful life. All the meters were replaced in 2019, but the fittings, service lines, and meter boxes were not. Often we find that the meter box is from 2010, the meter is from 2019, and the service line and curb or corpstop are original. Many services need to be moved, improved, or replaced. This is slow, difficult, and expensive work. We have new main line pipes in the ground that were not put into use because the customer service lines were not transferred over to it. We have leaking service lines and customer lines under the roadway. Forty-seven percent of our water is unaccounted for, meaning that water has been treated, but was not sold to customers. As we find and fix these small leaks on service lines or in PRV vaults, we should see a decrease in water loss.

We are still pursuing a settlement with the engineering firm that was hired to manage the Aquifer Storage and Recovery feasibility well that was done in Fiscal Year 2020-21. The legal costs in the budget reflect the worst-case scenario, if we have to go to court.

Our slow sand filter ponds that were installed in the 1980s still have the original sand. However, we clean the ponds twice per year and the industry standard cleaning process removes a small amount of sand each time. When new, the ponds had 24" of sand. The lowest they are supposed to get is 18". Pond 3 and possibly pond 1 have fallen below 18", and we urgently need to replace the sand. Unfortunately, only one company in Oregon has the certification to sell NSF sand for drinking water filter ponds, and the price has skyrocketed. This budget includes money to hire Hydra Engineering to conduct a test that would allow us to use cheaper sand.

The overflow out of the Larch Mountain reservoir during the January storm caused a large wash out, and the hill to the south of the tank needs to be restored. This will require engineering and capital outlay. It is unclear at this time what will be involved, and the actual cost could vary greatly from the amount in the budget.

Thank you for volunteering to be on the budget committee. CWD depends on our volunteers!

Yours,

Ana Linden

District Manager/ Budget Officer