

Public comment for Lane County charter review

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Sat, Jun 15, 2024 at 4:13 PM

To: Lane County Commissioners, Charter Review Committee
Cc: Jenna Cusimano

With the Lane County Board of Commissioners continuing to accept public comment on the charter review, this public comment adds detail to my earlier comments to the charter review committee:

F	G	H	I	J	K	L
What do you think should be the top three priorities for the Charter Review Committee to consider when reviewing the County Charter?	Are there any other specific changes or updates you would like to see made to the Lane County Charter?	Are you in favor of changing the name of Lane County?	Please briefly explain the reasoning for your choice.	If you are in favor of changing the name, please suggest a new name for Lane County.	Should the names and descriptions of the county commissioner districts remain as is in the Charter? (see page 8 of the charter?)	Please briefly explain the reasoning for your choice.
Organize by watershed, enable participatory democracy, recognize rights of nature		<input type="radio"/> Yes	Realign by watershed adopt name of the watersheds	Watershed names according to USGS dataset	No	Align with watershed boundaries

Human use of fire, and our ingenuity in finding new fuels to burn, has ushered in a new era of warming on our planet known as the Pyrocene Age, during which water will become paramount to our survival as a species.

It is worth reviewing what John Wesley Powell, head of the U.S. Geological Survey, testified to the states of Montana and North Dakota as they held their constitutional conventions in 1889: He suggested aligning county administrative boundaries with watersheds.

This small change would build greater watershed awareness among citizens and agencies. Our political names and identities will match those of our major river systems and water bodies. Aligning county and agency administrative boundaries to watersheds will promote a holistic approach to water quality, air quality, habitat improvements, fish and wildlife health. It will better position our children and grandchildren to preserve and improve watershed health in response to rapidly accelerating climate change.

Here are the statements that John Wesley Powell shared with Montana and North Dakota in 1889:

"I want to present to you what I believe to be ultimately the political system which you have got to adopt in this country, and which the United States will be compelled sooner or later ultimately to recognize. I believe that the primary unit of organization...should be the drainage basin which would practically have a county organization---then that the government of the United States should cede all of the lands of that drainage basin to the people who live in that basin... I believe that the people of the drainage basin themselves are more interested than any other people can be in that particular drainage basin---that they are the only people who can properly administer that trust, and I believe that the people who live along every valley in this country should be the people who control three things besides the land on which they live---they should have the control of the water; they should have the control of the common or pasturage lands, and they should have the control of timber lands... Careful study of the matter will show you that the drainage basin is the natural unit and should be a county of this state. If then you will provide a system of counties by drainage basins, you have the fundamental organizations, and can in time acquire all the other rights and assume all the other duties which that organization demands." (from Proceeding and Debate of the Constitutional Convention [Montana], 820-23.)

"You should provide in the Constitution which you are making, that the water which falls from the heavens and rolls to the sea, down your great rivers ---that water shall be under the control of the people, subject always to the will of the people, that property in water should be impossible for individuals to possess." (from Major Powell's Address, Official Report of First Constitutional Convention of North Dakota, 410-12.)

Today, the same agency that John Wesley Powell once led provides national maps of these watersheds at different levels of detail. Large basins are made up of smaller watersheds, as shown in this illustration from [the Watershed Boundary Dataset](#):

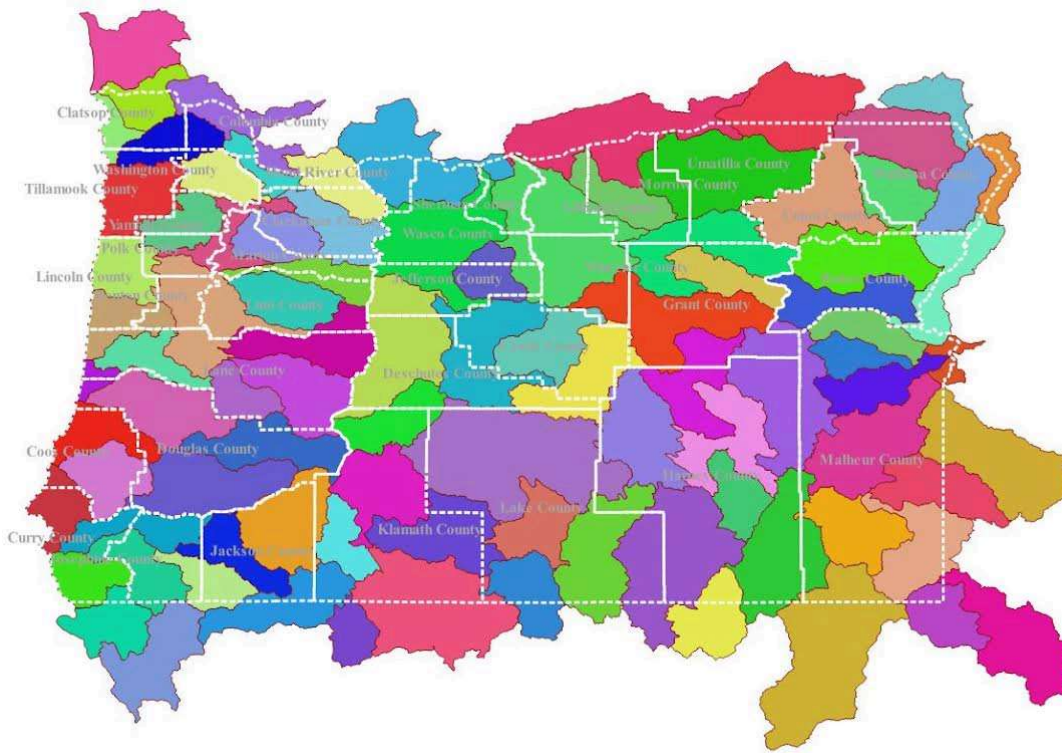


A Lane County example of this explanatory illustration might show the HU6 level Willamette Basin as including the HU8 "Upper Willamette" basin, which in turns includes a smaller HU10 "Long Tom River" watershed, which in turn includes a smaller HU12 "Amazon Creek" watershed, as in this short video, which zooms in and out to show Oregon's watersheds at different levels of detail: <https://youtu.be/nSzZZrVt-Q>

Here are the major HU6 watersheds within Oregon state lines:



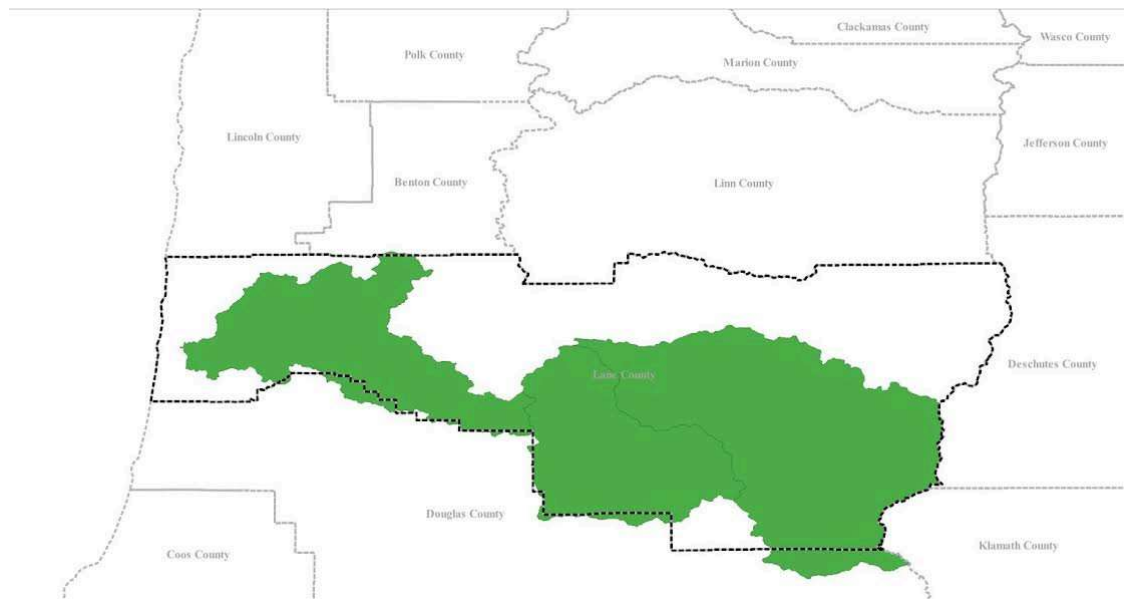
At the next level of detail, there are just over 90 HU8 watersheds intersecting Oregon:



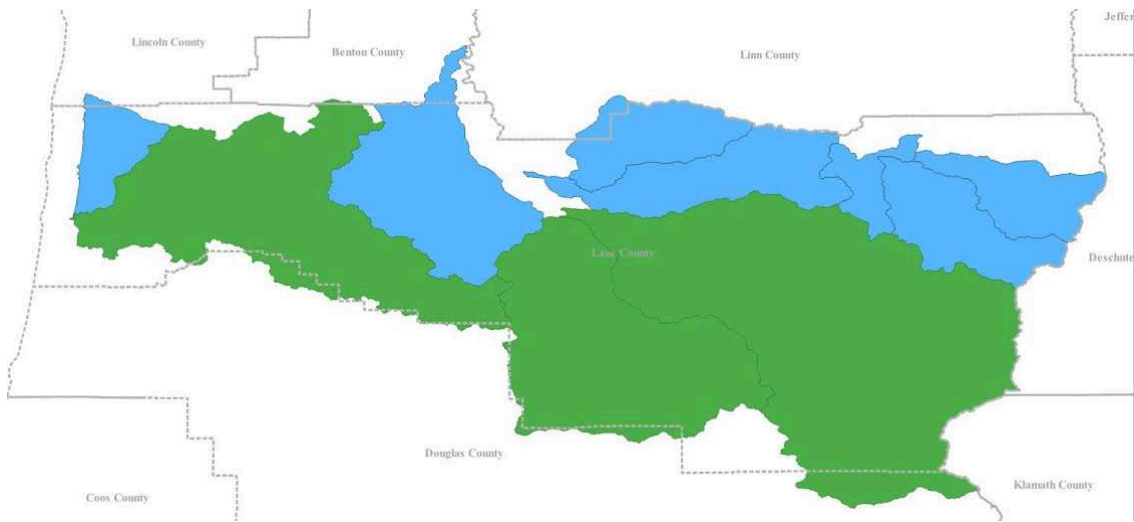
To give future generations a better opportunity to use their water resources wisely, we can start to align Oregon county boundaries with watersheds. As a starting point that would modify county boundaries as little as possible, we could combine watersheds at different HU levels into "watershed groups" or "watershed counties" that stay close to existing county boundaries.

Consider Lane County:

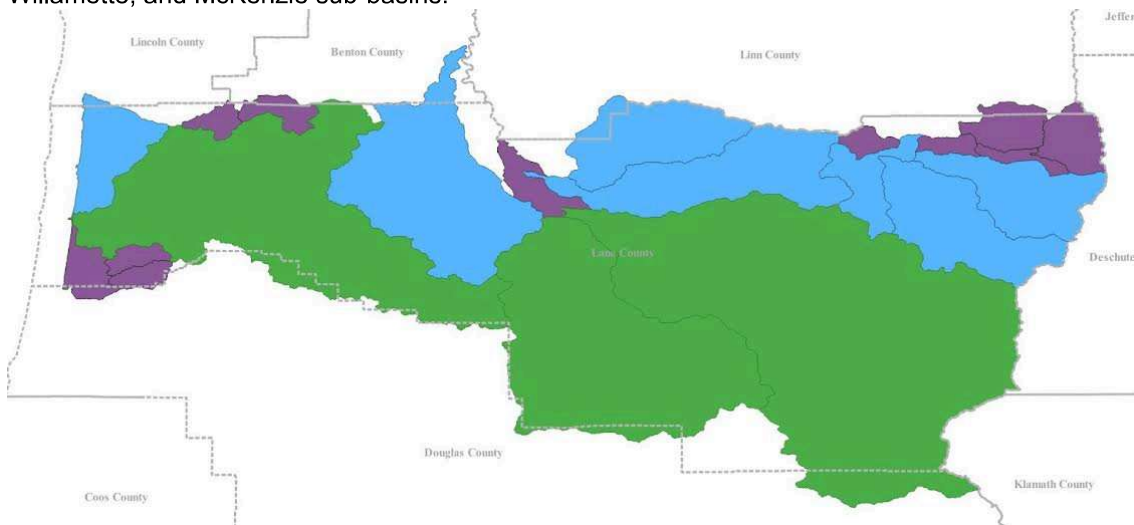
1) Add HU8 watersheds that are 90% or more within the county (green). For Lane County, this would pick up the entirety of the Middle Fork Willamette, Coast Fork Willamette, and Siuslaw watersheds.



2) Add the HU10 watersheds that are more than 90 percent within the county (blue). This would add HU10 watersheds from the HU8 McKenzie, HU8 Upper Willamette, and HU8 Alsea watersheds:



3) Add the HU12 watersheds that are more than 90 percent within the county (purple). This adds Siltcoos, Alsea, Upper Willamette, and McKenzie sub-basins:



The white spaces within the existing Lane County boundaries show where the remaining HU12 watersheds are shared by two or more counties. These counties would negotiate on where to draw those final lines.

The same process can be applied to every Oregon county. The result (90 percent threshold) shows all of the shared areas to be negotiated among the counties:



