SANDY CLEAN WATERS

For more information

Sandy Clean Waters Program: Challenges and Options

Commonly Asked Questions/Answers

Why do we have to do anything?

The existing wastewater plant can't keep up with Sandy's growth and is causing ongoing water quality issues. Without a solution the City risks serious consequences like fines, legal actions, and further court orders. Even with no growth the City can't meet compliance requirements on Tickle Creek in the long term.

What options have been studied for handling Sandy's wastewater?

The City has considered a wide range of alternatives that examine where wastewater is treated, how it's treated, and where it's discharged.

What about reducing the amount wastewater going to the treatment plant?

The City has already worked to reduce water use, but making more cuts would mean less water for residents and businesses, which could have a negative impact on our community and economy.

Evaluated Options

- **Do nothing:** This is an option but one with big consequences. It would stop future community growth, violate regulations, and lead to severe federal and state legal and financial penalties for the City.
- **Upgrade the existing plant:** The existing plant could be improved with the latest technology, but it still wouldn't consistently meet long-standing discharge requirements due to restrictions on Tickle Creek. Additionally, it would only be allowed to release wastewater during the wet season (November 1 to April 30) and would produce more water than could be used for irrigation for much of the year.
- **Increase irrigation demand:** Currently the City discharges water to a local nursery from May 1 to October 31 (the dry season), but this works only part of the year. During the wet season, there's no demand for water from irrigators.
- **Infiltration (soaking water into the ground):** The soils in Sandy's area can't absorb water fast enough, and recharging groundwater isn't legal in Oregon.
- **Increase influent (raw wastewater) storage:** Storing untreated wastewater creates health risks, produces odors, and would be very expensive. It is not feasible to store enough wastewater to allow Sandy to grow and still meet restrictions on Tickle Creek discharge.
- **Increase effluent (treated wastewater) storage:** Storing treated wastewater when there is no irrigation demand requires a great deal of land. The City would need to build an additional 45 million gallons of storage at or nearby the existing nursery pond to increase the total capacity needed to 70 MG. This 45 MG of storage is equal to nearly 70 Olympic-sized swimming pools or 25 acres. As the City continues to grow, more storage would be needed.
- **Relocate discharge to Deep Creek:** While Deep Creek is a larger stream than Tickle Creek, it has the same restrictions on when treated water can be released and the total amount of effluent that can be discharged.
- **Relocate discharge to Sandy River:** This option is very expensive and requires an extensive, controversial, and protracted permitting process, as well as substantial construction and private land access.
- **Send wastewater to Clackamas County:** Constructing this option would be more challenging and expensive than redirecting untreated wastewater flow to Gresham, and the closest plant (Tri-City WWTP) has less available capacity than Gresham.
- **Send wastewater to Gresham:** Redirecting untreated wastewater flow to Gresham's system is being explored as a preferred option. Sending wastewater to Gresham gets Sandy out of the treatment business and insulates the City from future regulations and other expensive requirements.
- **Restrict residential wastewater:** Mandating low-flow toilets, eliminating garbage disposals, or limiting water use at home would be difficult to enforce and would create significant financial burdens for homeowners. Regulations would have to be so restrictive to be effective that they would be infeasible.
- **Reduce stormwater flows:** The City has made substantial progress to limit groundwater, rainwater, and stormwater from entering the system, but this alone won't reduce flows enough to fix the problem.