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Portland and the Willamette Valley Prepare to Face Climate Change

A New Report Identifies 40 Measures to Build Regional Resilience

EUGENE, Oregon (January 27, 2011) – The Resource Innovation Group’s Climate Leadership Initiative today released “Building Climate Resiliency in the Lower Willamette Region of Western Oregon,” capping an 18-month project to engage local experts and stakeholders in how to prepare the Portland area for a changing climate. Modeling provided by the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute projects that Portland’s average summer temperature will increase 10 to 15°F this century, along with more extreme weather events and a loss in snowpack approaching 80% below current levels.

While these climate impacts will have significant regional effects on the local economy, social welfare, environment and quality-of-life, more than 200 local stakeholders found ample opportunity for government, private businesses, and individuals to reduce harm by preparing now. Stakeholders provided 40 recommendations including hardening infrastructure, reducing energy use, encouraging preventative health, diversifying the local businesses and restoring floodplains and wetlands. These measures will enhance existing sustainability initiatives, create the basis for a resilient regional economy, and assure continued prosperity for the region.

“Metro is committed to helping our region address climate change,” said Metro Councilor Rex Burkholder. “Small changes in key community investments can simultaneously reduce the impact of climate change and keep this a great place. People living and working in walkable neighborhoods use less energy, natural areas absorb carbon, and safe and reliable transportation options minimize contributions to global warming. Plus, we are rich in pioneering new businesses working on a new energy economy that can sell their products and practices worldwide.”

The report describes how taking action now to prepare for the impacts of climate change complements local sustainability and economic development initiatives by increasing access to clean and safe air, land and water, reducing our contribution to greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and energy use, promoting local food production and consumption, attracting sustainable business development, and assisting people in meeting their basic needs fairly and efficiently.
“The Portland area is rightly viewed as a national leader in sustainability,” said TRIG Executive Director Bob Doppelt. “All levels of government, the private sector, and households must continue to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to reduce the effects of climate change. But everyone must recognize that past emissions are already warming the atmosphere and will continue to impact the region for decades to come. The 200 experts consulted over the past year have given us a blueprint for preparing for the worst effects and seizing the opportunities that will come.”

The Resource Innovation Group (TRIG) is a 501(c)(3) that provides innovative solutions to the challenges of sustainability, climate change and other social, economic and ecological concerns. TRIG was founded in 1996, as an affiliate of the Portland State University Hatfield School of Government. In 2005, TRIG established the Climate Leadership Initiative (CLI) with a specific mission of fostering the development and application of innovative thinking and approaches to the complex causes and solutions to climate change. From 2001 through 2010 TRIG had an affiliation with the Institute for a Sustainable Environment at the University of Oregon. Today, TRIG is engaged in partnerships with a number of academic institutions, non-profits, private companies and government agencies nationwide.

To find out more, please visit: www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org

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Climate Leadership Initiative’s “Building Climate Resiliency in the Lower Willamette Region of Western Oregon” - Stakeholder Recommendations Report at a Glance

**Issue:** The region will face impacts this century as a result of climate change, including:
- Overall warming trend, with an increase of 10-15° F in summer;
- Wetter winters and drier summers, more rain in a shorter period of time;
- Snowpack loss in the Cascades of about 80% compared to current conditions and
- Higher stream runoff in winter and early spring (due to more precipitation falling as rain and in shorter periods), and decreased flows in summer for some locations.

**Geographic Scope:** Lower Willamette Region includes Benton, Clackamas, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Washington and Yamhill Counties

**Participants:** CLI engaged over 200 participants with expertise in natural, built, economic, human and cultural systems to:
- Assess local climate projections provided by the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute and Portland State University;
- Identify impacts across systems and sectors;
- Propose strategies to prepare for the projected changes; and
- Provide a vision of what the Lower Willamette would look like by mid-century should the recommendations be implemented.

**Key Impacts to the Region:**
The participants identified a number of impacts that may result from regional climate projections, including:
- Reduced water quality and shifts in water availability (more in winter, less in summer);
- Mis-match in life history timing of many species, possibly leading to population decline due to diminishing availability of essential resources when needed by each species;
- Decline in efficiency of, and potentially significant damage to, public works, transportation, and communication infrastructure;
- Extended duration and shifts in timing of seasonal peak water demands;
- Diminished productivity or total loss of some agricultural commodities, but potential opportunities for new crops and longer growing seasons;
- Increases in number of invasive, non-native plant and animal species, and expansion of ranges of others;
- Increased instances of heat illness, vector- and water-borne disease, mental health illness, respiratory distress; and
- Loss of cultural resources (e.g. salmon) and historical landmarks (e.g. covered bridges, century old barns and iconic natural features).

**Key Recommendations to Build Regional Resilience:**
To address these impacts, the participants provided recommendation to prepare, including:
- Protect floodplains, wetlands, and groundwater recharge areas;
- Further assess anticipated habitat changes in order to preserve existing high quality habitat and promote restoration where feasible;
• Preserve, expand, and connect existing high quality habitat and restore habitat of lesser quality that is crucial to species’ survival;
• Update infrastructure with projections for future population growth and climate change;
• Anticipate increased energy needs and provide incentives for efficiency and conservation;
• Diversify businesses, as well as agricultural and timber crops;
• Increase preventative health initiatives, notification and warning systems, and diversify health and emergency management partnerships; and
• Protect key cultural resources and improve historical architecture resiliency to extreme events.

A summary document is available at: www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org