

Ballot Measure No: 26-204

Ballot Title: Amends Charter: Increases protections for Bull Run Watershed.

Question: Shall Charter be amended to increase Bull Run Watershed protections by restricting access, regulating allowed activities and limiting land uses?

Financial Impact: There is no financial impact.

Probable Results of a “Yes” Vote: If this measure passes, the City Charter will be amended to increase the essential watershed protections for City-owned lands in the Bull Run by ensuring that any future proposed revisions or removal of these protections be approved by Portland voters.

Probable Results of a “No” Vote: The City Charter will not be amended. Currently, state and federal drinking water rules require that the City maintain its current protections of the watershed. However, once the City completes the water filtration facility for Bull Run water in 2027, the City will no longer be required to maintain this level of protection.

Background: The Bull Run Watershed is the primary drinking water supply for the City of Portland and its 20 wholesale customers. Water from the Bull Run serves more than 950,000 residents in the Portland metropolitan region providing roughly 100 million gallons of water per day on average in addition to hydroelectric power.

The 102 square-mile protected Bull Run Watershed collects water from rain and snowmelt, flows to the Bull Run River and its tributaries and eventually drains into two reservoirs, where more than 17 billion gallons are stored. The Portland Water Bureau treats the water before it enters into the three conduits that transport it to Portland. The water primarily moves through the system by gravity, requiring very little fossil fuel consumption to move water from its intake throughout the distribution system.

State law currently requires the city to protect the watershed, yet there is nothing in the City Charter that mandates the watershed protections that are in the City Code. The protections in the City Code can be amended or removed by the City Council. This measure would give the Bull Run Watershed charter protection, requiring a vote of Portland residents to make any changes to these protections in the future.

Summary: The measure adds a new section to the Portland City Charter which will include protections for city lands within the Bull Run Watershed Closure Area that are now in City Code.

The amendment will put into City Charter the requirements restricting public access, the general prohibition on logging and the prohibitions on development and on the transfer of city-owned lands or infrastructure to private businesses or organizations. The Charter will also require that city-initiated work on the drinking water and hydroelectric infrastructure

in the watershed avoid or lessen impacts to surrounding ecosystems and cultural resources.

Supporters Say:

- This is such a valuable resource for the City of Portland; it needs to be protected in the City Charter so that any changes to these protections would have to be amended by the voters of Portland.
- Securing these protections is essential to protecting not only our drinking water, but also the Bull Run's old growth forests and to providing a largely undisturbed refuge for fish and wildlife.

Opponents Say:

- With completion of a filtration plant to be completed by 2027, the need to ban recreation and development in the Bull Run Watershed becomes moot. Filtration will keep Portland's drinking water safe while allowing use of this beautiful natural resource.
- This measure to protect the Bull Run Watershed is redundant; the Bull Run Watershed is already protected by City Code and state and federal laws. This is unnecessary.

