



# Otto Otter Character Usage and Guidelines

## **Introduction**

The Otto Otter Program represents a comprehensive water safety initiative, funded and managed by the Bureau of Reclamation. This program is designed to enhance public safety by raising awareness about the risks associated with hydropower and irrigation structures while addressing other related water hazards. Through targeted education and outreach efforts, the Otto Otter Program seeks to foster a safer environment for all community members while promoting informed decision-making while living near these waterways.

## **Purpose of Document**

Reclamation will provide this document as a framework for external and internal usage to support future water safety initiatives. Its primary purposes are as follows:

- Establishing clear guidelines to ensure consistent and accurate messaging about water safety initiatives
- Offering program information to partner organizations and internal teams to enhance collaboration and awareness regarding water safety
- Fostering a culture of safety in communities surrounding hydropower and irrigation waterways through education and awareness

Through this framework, Reclamation intends to utilize past experiences to enhance future endeavors, ensuring a safety-focused approach to public initiatives.

## **History**

In 1957, the Bureau of Reclamation partnered with the American Red Cross to develop a public awareness program aimed at reducing drownings on Reclamation's dams, reservoirs, and canals. This initiative, known as "Operation Westwide," saw pilot programs implemented in the Yakima and Boise projects. Unfortunately, there are no existing records regarding this program.

In 1962, the Reclamation Commissioner requested that each region establish at least one local Water Safety Council; however, records from this endeavor are also unavailable.

In 1974, Reclamation played a role in forming the Columbia Basin Water Safety Council in central Washington. Key cooperating partners were the local American Red Cross, irrigation districts, the Grant County Sheriff, the Washington Department of Game, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the Grant County Public Utility District. The following year, the council sponsored a poster contest. Thirty-six school districts were invited participate developing a public figure to serve as the council's water safety representative. Lori Presnell, a fourth grader at Hiawatha Elementary

School, in Othello Washington, won the contest with the creation of Otto Otter. Subsequently, in a 1975 memo to Reclamations' Pacific Northwest region, the Council granted permission for Otto to be re-drawn and utilized throughout Reclamation.

The coloring book titled "Otto Otter for Safe Water" was first published in the mid-1970s by the PN Region, illustrated by Dennis Kinchoeloe. A suite of related items—such as iron-on shirt transfers, stickers, and posters—was also developed.

On the establishment of the program, the target audience for Otto and related materials was school-aged children. In the mid-1980s, a Spanish-language version of the "Otto Otter for Water Safety" coloring book was printed. In 2006, a new version of this coloring book was created, illustrated by Reclamation lead illustrator Bobby Gaytan, which remains the most current edition and is distributed annually. English and Spanish versions have been available on the CPN website since the summer 2006.

In 2009, Memoranda of Agreement were established to create a partnership for implementing the Water Safety Otto Otter Program among the Bureau of Reclamation, the Idaho Water Users Association, the Oregon Water Resources Congress, and the Washington State Water Resources Association. This alignment provided a systematic approach to disseminating educational materials annually across the three states.

Now, there are educational materials developed for ages 8 to 16, with ongoing efforts to expand to adult audiences. Water safety is a topic that affects all ages, and it is Reclamation's responsibility to create communication materials that resonate with its audiences, new and existing. By engaging all ages, we aim to foster a culture of safety that empowers community members to make informed decisions regarding waterway interaction. Through outreach and program development, Reclamation seeks to ensure everyone is equipped with the knowledge they need to safely navigate risk associated with hydropower and irrigation structures. Ultimately, our commitment to comprehensive education plays a vital role in enhancing public awareness to help promote a safer living environment for all.

## **Program Goals and Objectives**

Otto Otter has endured as a recognizable symbol synonymous with water safety to help ensure he remains relevant and engaging for children, teens, and adults. To do so, our objectives are to

- Create dynamic and interactive content that resonates with today's youth while expanding outreach efforts to include teens and adults via digital media, social platforms, and innovative educational techniques to foster engagement and retention of vital safety information.
- Identify and capitalize on opportunities for Otto Otter to appear at community events, schools, and public gatherings.

- Implement a robust feedback mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. By regularly assessing responses from the public, partners, and staff, we will identify areas for improvement and streamline processes to enhance overall program efficiency.

## **Program Components**

The primary means of communication with the Water Safety Manager is through the Otto Otter webpage on Reclamation's website. Additionally, users can access and download available worksheets and coloring books for printing.

To further enhance outreach efforts, the program employs the Otto Otter suit, which can be reserved for events such as school presentations, community gatherings, and public safety initiatives.

Additionally, members of the public can request PowerPoint guides and presentation materials related to water safety. These materials can be requested alongside printed worksheets, bookmarks, stickers, and the Canal Safety and Water Delivery Game. Depending on staffing availability, requests for canal safety presentations can also be submitted, during which a Bureau of Reclamation employee will attend classrooms or community events to distribute materials and promote the safety message.

Another external outlet where Otto Otter can be found is on the Bureau of Reclamation's social media platforms. Through these channels, the character engages with a wider audience, sharing valuable information, resources, and updates related to water safety.

Bureau of Reclamation [Facebook](#)

[Bureau of Reclamation \(@bureau\\_of\\_reclamation\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

[Bureau of Reclamation: Posts | LinkedIn](#)

[Bureau of Reclamation \(@usbr\) / X](#)

Together, these resources and assets provide a comprehensive framework for disseminating important water safety information to diverse audiences.

## **Image and Appearance**

The key to Otto Otter's recognition is credited to the positive image that has been promoted since the inception of the Water Safety Program. Uniform standards have been identified for all aspects of Otto Otter's image, from drawings to the manufacture of the costume to public appearances.

## **Character Guidelines**

The Otto Otter character serves as the official logo of the Water Safety Program. It is essential that Otto Otter is never depicted as endorsing any product, whether explicitly or implicitly, and should not be shown alongside any products. The focus of Otto Otter's messaging must always center on water safety. Such messages include:

**Water is powerful. Respect it. Don't risk it.**

**Stay safe and stay out of irrigation canals!**

Any artwork featuring the image of Otto Otter must receive prior approval from the Bureau of Reclamation before use. If additional artwork is needed, requestors should reach out to the program manager to discuss the scope of the project and collaborate with the in-house illustrator. This process ensures that all representations of Otto Otter maintain consistency and integrity in conveying the water safety message.

## **Otto Otter Costume Guidelines**

The Otto Otter suit is intended for use at events where water safety education is both relevant and actively conveyed. Appropriate events include parades, school appearances, fairs, youth group meetings, conservation activities, television appearances, sporting events, civic and community gatherings, and trade shows. During all appearances, a uniformed escort must accompany Otto Otter to reinforce the water safety message.

Inappropriate uses of the Otto Otter costume include events such as employee Christmas and Halloween parties, retirement parties, summer picnics, job fairs, or any situations that may compromise Otto's integrity or create the appearance of impropriety. It is essential that every appearance provides an opportunity to share a water safety message, ensuring that Otto Otter remains focused on promoting safety awareness while engaging with the community.

- All appearances of Otto Otter must include a water safety education component and adhere to the Otto Otter appearance guidelines. Requestors are required to consult these guidelines for detailed instructions.
- All appearance requests are subject to the availability and approval of either the Reclamation area office or the Bureau of Reclamation region office.
- Requestors must submit a detailed event request, including the timeframe, scope, and communication elements, for approval by the Water Safety Program.
- Following approval, the Bureau of Reclamation will provide a single-use agreement specific to the event or series of events.

- For events that require an entrance fee, Otto Otter's image cannot be used to promote registration or attendance. His tagline and approved prevention messaging may only be used for non-advertising purposes.
- For trade conferences and business meetings, the agenda must include a water safety education opportunity, either through dedicated sessions or an exhibit booth.
- There must be no implication of commercial endorsement by Otto Otter, the accompanying uniformed escort, or the sponsoring agency. Suitable backdrops and props for multimedia reproductions and public photo opportunities should be carefully considered.
- The escort must always remain with Otto Otter, even during photographs, interviews, and appearances. Any videos taken should incorporate a water safety message or call to action.
- Any artwork featuring Otto Otter must receive prior approval from the Water Safety Program to ensure compliance with branding and safety messaging guidelines.

Individuals who wear and use the costume agree to:

1. **Communication Restrictions:** You are not to speak during costumed appearances unless you have an approved voice modulator. Instead, the accompanying uniformed agency representative should handle conversations and explanations. If you are operating without a handler, any conversation should focus on water safety issues, keeping responses concise and relevant.
2. **Animated Interaction:** While in the costume, exhibit appropriate animation to engage effectively with the audience. Express sincerity and interest by moving your paws, head, and legs to convey a warm and inviting presence.
3. **Demeanor:** Maintain a dignified and friendly appearance. Avoid any clowning, horseplay, inappropriate dancing, or gestures, ensuring you always represent Otto Otter with courtesy and tact.
4. **Public Interaction:** Otto must never act aggressively and should allow the public to approach first, particularly small children. Use open body language—such as spreading your arms or extending a paw—to indicate it's okay for visitors to approach. Otto Otter cannot initiate physical contact but can wait for a child to engage. This engagement is limited to hugs, high-fives and fist bumps.
5. **Photography Guidelines:** Always be photographed in full costume, ensuring the headpiece is always worn. Do not allow photographs taken while entering or exiting the costume.



6. **Maintaining Anonymity:** Remain anonymous during every appearance and in any associated publicity. Make sure the costume is clean, complete, and in good condition for each event.
7. **Costume Visibility:** Keep the costume out of sight before and after use to maintain the illusion and character of Otto Otter.
8. **Accompanied Appearances:** Always be accompanied by an appropriately uniformed escort during public appearances, except in situations where it is impractical, such as on a parade float.
9. **Substance Restrictions:** Do not use alcohol or illicit drugs prior to or during any Otto Otter appearance. This guideline also applies to uniformed escorts.
10. **Handler Approach:** It is recommended that one person wears the suit while another acts as a “handler” to answer questions and distribute educational materials, such as coloring books.

## **Character Protection**

The recognized name of Otto Otter, along with his message, and the property rights associated with the trademark, are highly valued. It is essential to maintain a clear distinction between Otto Otter, his messaging, educational materials, and those of other symbols to prevent any improper use. Achieving this requires dedicated and vigorous protection of the Otto Otter brand.

Such protection is critical not only for the integrity of the Otto Otter character but also for reinforcing credibility with sponsoring organizations and the public. By safeguarding the Otto Otter name and image, we ensure that the core message of water safety remains intact and consistently conveyed across all platforms and materials.