

WALLA WALLA BASIN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BAC) MEETING SUMMARY

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

1:00-4:30 p.m. (Meeting + Field Trip)

Room 2023-24 | Water & Environment Center at WWCC | 640 Water Center Drive

Hybrid Meeting until 2:30pm, then in-person field trip

Time*	Agenda Item (Action items are marked with "!")	Reference Materials	Presenter(s)
1:00 (10 min)	Welcome and Introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and introductions Review agenda Opening remarks from Tri-Sovereign Executives 	Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alexandra Doty, Cascadia Amanda Cronin, Project Manager Tri-Sovereign Executives
1:10 (20 min)	Snowpack and Streamflow Forecast Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share updates on the status of snowpack and impacts for streamflow and water supply in the Basin 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caroline Mellor, Ecology
1:30 (20 min)	Water Management Updates from Ecology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piloting "developed water" under RCW 90.90.120 Water master communication in the Touchet 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jaime Short, Ecology
1:50 (10 min)	City of Walla Walla Upper Watershed Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project introduction Discuss integration with WW2050 	Summary handout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amanda Cronin Frank Nicholson, City of WW
2:00 (15 min)	WA Legislative Report Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hear an update on WA's leg report required under RCW 90.90.120 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dave Christensen, Ecology Liddy Grossman, Ecology
2:15 (10 mins)	Updates <i>(May be done at field trip location depending on timing)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update on the OR legislation Updates on instream flow drought response Project and funding updates from BAC members Agenda ideas Other updates? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitation Team BAC Members
2:25 (5 min)	Public Comment		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alexandra Doty
2:30* (5 min)	Closing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Next steps Field trip logistics Closing comments 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alexandra Doty Amanda Cronin
2:35 pm – 4:30pm (2 hrs)	Mill Creek Spring Chinook Smolt Release Field Trip <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carpool if possible. Drive east on Mill Creek Rd to the end near the City of Walla Walla's intake. Smolt release planned for 3pm. https://maps.app.goo.gl/YqnBqaTFDVZMka2c6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anton Chiono, CTUIR Fish Biologists from ODFW/CTUIR

*All times are approximate and may change.



Welcome & Introductions

- Brook Beeler, Ecology, thanked everyone for coming. She noted that the Tri-Sovereigns met in-person to discuss talking points for the legislative delegation, current tasks and capacity, and celebrate that the Walla Walla legislation is close to passing in Oregon!
- Alexandra Doty, facilitator, reviewed the agenda and led roll call. Attendees are listed in [Appendix A. Attendees](#).

Snowpack and Streamflow Forecast Report

Presentation by Caroline Mellor, Ecology

- Ecology issued a drought declaration for the Walla Walla Basin last year and is likely to extend the declaration past June of this year.
- Walla Walla Basin current snowpack is at 83% of normal/average snowpack, which is normal snowpack for this day compared to the last 30 years. There are 14 Snowpack Telemetry Network (SNOTEL) sites where we collect snowpack data for the Walla Walla Basin. Three sites are in WA, and the rest are in OR. Currently, the Oregon side of Walla Walla is doing better than the Washington side.
- Looking at the Water Year Projection (water year is October to October), Walla Walla is more likely to be above normal for snowpack specifically. The water year snowpack measure compares the amount of snow per month against the median for the last 30 years. Walla Walla had a good January and February compared to the median.
- There's been a lot of temperature variety so far this water year, but the overall trend has been warmer than normal, with variations in the magnitude from normal.
- Precipitation is below normal but most of the Basin is not significantly below normal. There is still some minor concern for the Walla Walla Basin; we're seeing 79-85% of normal precipitation for the Walla Walla. When we compare it to the historical record, this water year is the 12th lowest precipitation over the historical record in the southeast portion of the Basin (in Oregon). Walla Walla water year to date precipitation is at 93% of normal but the snowpack has a mix of normal and below normal across the Basin, with Touchet at 68%, Wolf Creek at 56%, Spruce Springs at 43%, and Taylor Green at 68% of normal snowpack, with the rest of the Basin closer to normal.
- Soil moisture is an important measure; it describes how well precipitation can be absorbed. Looking at southeastern WA and northeastern OR, there's a wide variety of soil moisture from satellite data – some areas of real concern, and others that are looking very good.
- We can analyze temperature probabilities over the next three months. Ecology is concerned, since there is a high probability of above-normal temperatures which impacts melting snowpack. In Oregon, snowpack is looking better right now, but if temperatures get too high, too soon, that will impact snowmelt and soil moisture.
- Overall, for Walla Walla, the 2024 water year has been a mix: snowpack is looking better in Oregon than in Washington. Water users should plan for a drier than normal year, and we still have some concerns with snowpack. We are worried about a super warm spring, which would cause snowpack to melt too quickly.

BAC Discussion and Questions

- A BAC member asked how this water year currently compares to 2015, since 2015 was the last statewide drought.
 - Caroline answered that, while snowpack is not looking great across Washington, things are not looking as bad as they did in 2015. Statewide, we were at 24% historical average snowpack on March 27, 2015, and today (March 27, 2024), we are at 68%. For the Walla Walla in particular, on March 27, 2015, Walla Walla snowpack was at 43%. Today, we are at 83% in the Walla Walla. Despite precipitation looking okay in 2015, the low snowpack in 2015 really impacted streamflow and contributed to the 2015 drought.
- A member of the public asked how this water year currently compares to 2021, since 2021 was the worst year they had ever had for dry-land wheat farming. Did we have a better snowpack in 2021 or today?
 - A BAC member responded that the major impact in 2021 was a very dry soil column – the USDA issued a soil moisture drought notice that year. The soil moisture drought likely had a big impact on dry-land wheat farming, where as the 2015 drought was due to lack of snowpack.
 - The member of the public agreed; when they pulled soil tests, there was no moisture at all.



- Caroline added that soil moisture and soil conditions have a very big impact on what precipitation is actually retained in our soil.

Water Management Updates

Managing Developed Water in the Walla Walla Basin – Jaime Short, Ecology

- Based on RCW 90.90.120, developed water is “any increase in the quantity of water supply due to a project being implemented under the Walla Walla water 2050 plan that is completed after July 23, 2023.” Ecology has the authority to designate developed water for instream flow purposes, and water supplies that are developed under the 2050 plan are unavailable to satisfy existing water rights. Thus, based on the new legislation, developed water will have the highest priority.
- For water rights originating in WA, a change/transfer to the Trust program along with an appealable decision will document the developed water. However, Ecology is currently trying to figure out how to manage developed water with Oregon.
- Ecology is proposing the following process: if water is enrolled in Oregon’s instream program, then OWRD will issue an Order that describes the water’s purpose, place, and quantity. OWRD will apply to enter a water right into Ecology’s Trust Water Rights Program. Ecology will evaluate and conduct community outreach, then issue an appealable Order with management points, timeframes, and quantities.
- Ecology has a draft public outreach strategy for the outreach portion of their evaluation period. Some of the outreach methods are legally required, and the rest are optional. Please let Jaime know if there are other ways that Ecology should reach the community and let them know this is happening. What is the best way to get people aware of what they’re going to see and what to expect? Developed water is different than anything that’s ever been done, so Ecology wants to get this information out to the public.
- Developed water will be shepherded downstream by the water master, Eric Hartwig. Flows will be protected from other users, even those with senior priority dates. Eric will reach out directly to water users and let them know when developed water is instream. The intent of this program is to hydrate those streams, so we have enough water to move fish all the way through the system.
- Ecology plans to use the existing monitoring stations. They want to create a durable implementation program for the developed water.

BAC Discussion and Questions

- Tom Tebb, Ecology, added that developed water could be Oregon trust water that comes through a conservation project or an acquisition, or Washington trust water. It could also come from a future anchor project that brings water into the Basin. This is water that is in addition to what already exists.
 - Jaime commented that we see many variabilities in flow. Developed water might not look new all the time, but there are many different sources from where this water might come from.
- A BAC member asked if developed water must be placed in the Washington trust program?
 - Jaime answered that yes, the statutory language is quite clear. Developed water must come through the state trust program. No matter the source of the developed water, Ecology will work through required steps of the trust program, including public input and an appealable process.
 - A BAC member asked if the developed water was brought in by a privately funded project, does it still need to be in the trust program?
 - Jaime answered that if we’re going to protect it, it must be in the trust program. The process is the same no matter the beneficiary of that developed water.
- A BAC member asked if there was any more work to be done on this process.
 - Jaime answered that the process is mostly set. Ecology worked with their attorneys, and they believe this Washington trust program application process, with Oregon as the applicant since they hold the instream flow water, is the best management method.
- A BAC member asked who Ecology wants to reach for outreach.
 - Jaime responded that the priority audience is people who have water rights (water users). Since the

developed water will likely be pushed past them, Ecology wants to give them notice early and often. The second tier is the community at large. It's important for people to see the success, the benefits to the landscape! Water will be flowing when previously it might have been dry. Please send ideas for outreach to Jaime Short or the facilitation team.

- A BAC member asked how Ecology plans to account for the seepage losses at particular reaches, such as Nursery Bridge. They want to participate by letting developed water flow by, but as an irrigator, if Ecology requests they let 100 cfs pass by and there's only 70 cfs instream, it will have a negative impact on them.
 - Jaime noted that this loss is why Ecology is asking for documentation from Oregon, to account all the way to the state line.
- A BAC member asked what defines a project as being developed under the Walla Walla 2050 plan.
 - Tom Tebb answered that, as a group, we're going to continue working through those kinds of questions. The initial definition is if a project has been approved by the BAC for funding, such as by Ecology OCR, and Ecology requested funding from the state legislature, that constitutes a project. However, there's flexibility and the BAC can help define this.
 - Jaime added that there are many projects that fit under the umbrella of 2050. There are some things that would theoretically improve flows but if we can't quantify it, we can't protect that bonus. So, we must be discreet about what constitutes developed water.

Modernizing Management on the Touchet – Jaime Short, Ecology

- The current Ecology practice regulating senior water users is time intensive and impacts other priority work. Previously, they sent a letter to users when low flows were predicted and then sent another letter when the flows actually dropped off.
- Ecology is aiming to switch to a call-in number during low flows, based on the projected needs of senior users. Then, users can call the number and it will have an up-to-date message that informs users if/when they're able to turn back on.
- Ecology recently sent out 600 letters to anyone who had a parcel within the area of use. They asked recipients to tell Ecology how much and when they plan to irrigate this year. The watermaster (Eric Hartwig) will then build a file of people's needs. If flows are dropping, Ecology will send out a warning letter. If they drop too low, Ecology will send out another letter with the call-in number, and people can call in to see whether they're on or off.
- They are trying this new method out and will adjust as it goes to make sure it works well for users. Flows are just dropping too frequently and Ecology doesn't have the capacity to continue their current level of tweaking.

BAC Discussion and Questions

- A BAC member asked how frequently the call-in message will be updated?
 - Eric answered that if he has a hold on water, he will likely update the message 1-3 times per week. He'll keep in touch with irrigators to maintain an updated picture of their water needs/plans each week.
 - Jaime added that Ecology wants everyone to learn what the process is and how to participate. We want people to take ownership and responsibility for their water use.
- A BAC member commented that mailed letters are often unread or thrown away – they encouraged Ecology to use a different method.
 - Jaime shared that, ideally, Ecology will move away from letters or add a notification method in addition to the letters. One possibility is the Walla Walla 2050 website. Ecology can try different means of communication and adjust for what works best.

Washington Legislative Report

Presentation by Liddy Grossman and Noah Wentzel, Ecology

- In RCW 90.90.120, Ecology is directed to develop recommendations for an appropriate bistate legal regulatory framework. Ecology is required to submit a legislative report that includes these recommendations. The report is due June 30, 2025.



- The report will focus on developed water in particular, and will be developed in collaboration with the State of Oregon and in consultation with CTUIR.
- There are several options for a bistate legal regulatory framework currently under consideration. They include:

Regulatory Framework	Pros	Cons
Memorandum of Agreement/Understanding (MOA or MOU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful strategy if OR and WA decide to enter a compact; would create a baseline for a future compact. • Allows for two parties to adapt the agreement based on present and future conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of legal enforceability • In event of disagreement, Supreme Court isn't obligated to make a ruling
Mutual Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enshrines this in statute rather than in an agreement • Doesn't require congressional action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to ensure both state legislatures agree to the terms • Less adaptable • Unclear how it can regulate existing rights
Interstate Compact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes a legal relationship • More formalized guidelines and procedure • If congressionally ratified, it would create ultimate enforceability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No precedent: there has never been a compact of this nature • Lack of enforceability • Congressional ratification can take years/decades

- Dave Christensen, Ecology, shared that we need an agreement in place so water can be managed collaboratively between Washington and Oregon. There is a tension between something more complex and more rigorous, and something simpler and easier to do, but maybe less durable. We want to hear from BAC members about the kinds of recommendations you think we should make to the legislature.
- Tom Tebb added that this is a critical issue to solve in the Basin, and providing a strong recommendation to both state legislatures will be a big piece of our success. He hopes that we can do something between the two states that respects the sovereignty of those two states and CTUIR, and builds in solutions for dispute resolution. BAC feedback will be essential to making these recommendations.
- Chris Kowitz, OWRD, updated the BAC that the Oregon legislation has been signed by the Governor, and is now law! Thank you to everyone who provided support. OWRD is collaborating with Ecology on the legislative reports and management recommendations.

City of Walla Walla Resiliency Project

Presentation by Amanda Cronin, AMP Insights, and Frank Nicholson, City of Walla Walla

- The City of Walla Walla received a FEMA grant for building resilient infrastructure and communities. The City hired Consor Engineering and AMP Insights to evaluate mitigation actions that can help the city be more climate resilient, and in the event of a high severity fire, be able to continue to provide high quality water from the watershed.
- Part of the project will be a committee of stakeholders and partners that provides feedback on development of the plan. Recognizing that the Walla Walla 2050 plan includes two strategies that are directly related to this project, is the BAC interested in being the umbrella for this work? The committee could become a BAC workgroup.
- In 2020, there was a flood in Mill Creek. 1/3 mile of road was completely washed out, and the City lost 1/3 mile of their pipeline. The City lost its water supply for 4 months and had to deplete the groundwater instead. The goal of this project is to make sure that when the next flood comes, Mill Creek is more resilient, and the watershed isn't threatened. Please help the City of Walla Walla plan for the future!

BAC Discussion

- A BAC member shared that they are in favor of using the BAC structure to support this work.



Public Comment

No public comment.

Mill Creek Spring Chinook Smolt Release Field Trip

BAC members attended the Spring Chinook Smolt Release at Mill Creek! For more information on the smolt release, see [Appendix B. Confederated Umatilla Journal's Article on Spring Chinook Release.](#)

Appendix A. Attendees

WWBAC Members & Alternates

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Agriculture		
Alli	Newhouse	Little River Group
Annie	Byerley	WA Agriculture / Walla Walla Conservation District
Mark	Wagoner	Gardena Farms Irrigation District
Mike	Ingham	Gardena Farms Irrigation District
Travis	Trumbull	WWRID
Environment		
Judith	Johnson	Kooskooskie Commons
Ralph	Perkins	WWBWC
Sarah	Dymecki	Washington Water Trust
Troy	Baker	Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council
Recreation/Quality of Life		
Linda	Herbert	Blue Mountain Land Trust
Economic Development		
Amy	Schwab	Port of Walla Walla
Nick	Velluzzi	Walla Walla Community College
Local Government		
Frank	Nicholson	City of Walla Walla
Jack	Miller	Columbia County
Robert	McAndrews	City of College Place
Todd	Kimball	Walla Walla County
State Government		
Cole	Hendrickson	ODEQ
Jeff	Dengel	WDFW
Mark	Wachtel	WDFW
Taylor	McCroskey	ODFW
Tribal Government		
Chris	Marks	CTUIR
Jerimiah	Bonifer	CTUIR
Federal Government		
Cindy	Boen	US Army Corps of Engineers
Colleen	Fagan	NOAA NMFS
Justin	Yeager	NOAA NMFS
Shawn	Nelson	US Army Corps of Engineers
Tri-Sovereigns (Ex-Officio/Non-Voting Members)		



Anton	Chiono	CTUIR
Brook	Beeler	Ecology
Chris	Kowitz	OWRD
Ross	Deardorff	OWRD

WWBAC Members Not in Attendance

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Environment		
Steve	Martin	Snake River Salmon Recovery Board
Local Government		
Dan	Dorran	Umatilla County
Steven	Patten	City of Milton-Freewater

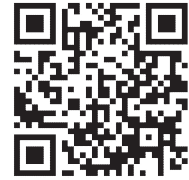
Other Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Alexandra	Doty	Cascadia Consulting Group
Alison	Crowley	WWCCD
Alle	Brown-Law	Cascadia Consulting Group
Amanda	Cronin	AMP Insights
Bryan	Gartland	Aspect Consulting
Caroline	Mellor	Ecology
Charlotte	Regula-Whitefield	OWRD
Dave	Christensen	Ecology
Dena	Marshall	OWRD
Dillon	Crawford	City of Walla Walla
Eric	Hartwig	Ecology
Jaime	Short	Ecology
Jamie	Clark	WA DOH
Jeremy	Sikes	Ecology
Jon	Campbell	Member of the Public
Kate	Smith	Walla Walla Union Bulletin
Liddy	Grossman	Ecology
Noah	Wentzel	Ecology
Patrick	Miller	USGS
Perry	Dozier	Washington State Senator, 16th Legislative District
Phil	Brown	Northwest GW SVCS
Reed	Curcio	Curcio Farms
Scott	Tarbutton	Ecology
Stuart	Crane	Yakama Nation
Tessa	Willburn	OWRD



Tim	Poppleton	Ecology
Tom	Tebb	Ecology
Unknown Call-in User 1		

Appendix B. Confederated Umatilla Journal's Article on Spring Chinook Release



Tribe moving ahead with Wildhorse expansion

By CHRIS AADLAND
Reporter

MISSION – Tribal leaders are resuming plans for a massive hotel and convention center expansion project at Wildhorse Resort & Casino that officials estimate could cost nearly \$130 million.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's (CTUIR) Board of Trustees (BOT) voted on March 17 to hire two companies to oversee construction management and to finalize the the expansion design that includes a

new 10-story hotel and 1,500-seat convention center. The expansion was originally planned for 2019 but called off when construction costs soared during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The March resolution didn't authorize starting construction, but tribal and casino leaders are also looking ahead to what improvements they'd like to pursue, such as an outdoor event space, once the expansion is complete.

Tribal leaders will decide whether to break ground and other details, such as a project budget and

how the tribe – which owns and operates Wildhorse – will pay for the expansion, after reviewing the final design and cost proposals.

The project is estimated to cost about \$128 million, Wildhorse CEO Gary George said during the March 14 BOT work session regarding the project. However, Wildhorse still has \$17 million in debt to pay off from previous projects.

The proposed expansion would double the casino's convention-hosting capacity and would



The proposed Wildhorse Casino & Resort expansion includes a new 214 room hotel and convention space. CUJ FILE PHOTO

WILDHORSE CONTINUED PAGE 12

CTUIR releases thousands of spring Chinook



Ryan Ashcroft, assistant manager of the South Fork Walla Walla River Hatchery, holds a spring Chinook smolt March 27, 2024, before releasing it and 59,999 of its relatives into the Walla Walla River. LEE GAVIN | CUJ PHOTO

By CHRIS AADLAND
Reporter

WALLA WALLA, Wash. – For the last year and a half or so, employees at the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's (CTUIR) fish hatchery on the South Fork Walla Walla River raised hundreds of thousands of juvenile spring Chinook salmon.

Employees collected and incubated fertilized eggs then transferred them

to massive tanks when hatched. They worked vigilantly to make sure the juvenile fish were well fed, kept disease-free and swimming in water that was the ideal temperature for their development – all to eventually release the smolt into the Walla Walla River Basin. They hope many survive into adulthood and return a few years later, which may someday eliminate the need for their jobs.

On March 27, about 60,000 of those nurtured juvenile spring

Chinook salmon were siphoned out of a large tanker truck parked where the City of Walla Walla diverts its drinking water from Mill Creek and dropped into the fast-moving water to begin their journey to the sea.

The release was part of tribal efforts to reintroduce spring Chinook salmon to a river and basin – and part of a larger scope of work to help salmon species recover in the region – where they've been extinct for about 100 years. It also came just days after Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek signed legislation that the tribe and partners in a Walla Walla River Basin water management initiative say was needed to help ensure those efforts are successful.

"This basin holds traditional and historical value to the tribes. But also, it's a place where we've seen our natural resources dwindle," CTUIR Fisheries Program Manager and tribal member Jerimiah Bonifer said after the March 27 release. "Tribal harvest within the basin is an important part of our First Foods mission."

It was the tribal hatchery's second release of spring Chinook salmon smolts that staff had reared from egg

CHINOOK CONTINUED PAGE 10

CDA land split vote divides partners

By CHRIS AADLAND
Reporter

MISSION – Last July, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) Executive Director Donald Sampson opened a ceremony celebrating the tribe and four intergovernmental partners taking over ownership of thousands of acres of valuable land with a blessing in which he said the land was "coming back to us – all of us."

The Morrow and Umatilla ports and Morrow County – three of the other four other members of that partnership, the Columbia Development Authority (CDA) – apparently don't share the sentiment.

Last year, the CTUIR and its CDA partners became owners of more than 9,500 acres of the former Umatilla Army Chemical Depot and had plans to use the land for industrial redevelopment, agricultural production, cultural resource protection and habitat restoration.

On March 26, the Port of

CDA CONTINUED PAGE 15

Are you registered to vote?
APRIL 30
is the last day to register in Oregon.

CHINOOK

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to this juvenile stage. The tribe plans to release 500,000 spring smolts annually – and is on track to release about 117,000 this season.

Officials hope to see 5,000 adults return each year to the basin to spawn to help rebuild the population. Last year, they counted nine.

The first fish from the hatchery program should begin returning in 2025.

The approximately 6-inch-long, year-and-a-half-old smolts released March 27 will join about 117,000 others that were released at the same spot the previous day to swim down the creek and into the Walla Walla River before making their way to the Columbia River, and eventually, the Pacific Ocean.

The juvenile Chinook released in March will most likely spend two or three years in the ocean, where they'll face many other challenges to their survival, before hopefully returning to Mill Creek, Bonifer said.

While the hatchery program is necessary to jumpstart restoration efforts in the basin, he said the goal is to eventually have a self-sustaining population again.

Salmon returning to the basin would not only ensure treaty-guaranteed access for tribal members but would also provide fishing opportunities for recreational



Spring Chinook smolt are released through a pipe into the South Fork Walla Walla River Wednesday, March 27. CHRIS AADLAND | CUJ PHOTO

anglers and contribute to and help heal the basin's ecosystem, Bonifer said.

“This is a step towards health and abundant salmon and steelhead,” he said. “We don't want to be reliant on hatcheries for those, but we also recognize that we need to be able to provide harvest opportunities for our tribal members in the near term, and this is a tool to do that.”

But under current conditions in the basin, Chinook returning to Mill Creek and other waters in the basin will be faced with harsh conditions that can make it difficult to survive the journey back upstream.

More than a century of over-allocated water supplies and population growth has led to poor habitat conditions – like water that is too warm or levels that are too low due to irrigation diversions. Climate change is expected to worsen conditions and lead to decreases in the snowpack that helps replenish water levels, as well as more frequent

and longer droughts.

In 2021, the CTUIR partnered with other groups and government bodies with a stake in the future of the basin and its water resources to develop a 30-year strategic plan that outlined management strategies that would foster cohesive cooperation between the entities involved.

The complex and expensive plan – the Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategic Plan – addresses ecological and other needs to aid salmon recovery efforts, as well as accounting for the needs for the basin's many other stakeholders, like the area's extensive wine and agriculture industries, that also rely on its limited water supplies.

But the 1,760 square-mile Walla Walla River watershed, in addition to being within the ancestral homelands of the CTUIR, is divided between Oregon and Washington. That has hampered conservation efforts and work to implement the management model due to a lack of coordination between the two states.

Senate Bill 1567, recently passed by Oregon legislators, eliminated the last barrier to cross-border cooperation in managing the basin's water. The legislation directs the state to work with the CTUIR and Washington state to cooperatively manage the basin's water and adopt the 30-year strategic plan as the framework.

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek signed the measure, which mirrored a similar proposal passed by Washington state lawmakers a year earlier, March 20.

Thanks to this legislation in Oregon, the tribe and state water managers have the authority to make sure that the increased streamflow the tribe and the city of Walla Walla have worked to create for salmon passage isn't diverted and decreased by downstream users.

For the smolts released this spring, it means they'll have a fighting chance to get upstream and spawn when they return.

“We want them to come back to that spot to spawn when they return as adults. The challenge has been ensuring there is enough water in Mill Creek and the Walla Walla River to allow fish to get back there,” said CTUIR Department of Natural Resources Habitat Conservation Project Leader Anton Chiono. “Now, for the first time ever, we have the ability to ensure that restored stream flows stay instream for fish all the way from the headwaters in Oregon to the mouth of the river in Washington.”



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500 SW Dorion Ave.
Pendleton, OR 97801-2035

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