

SB 956 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs

Action Date: 04/04/23

Action: Do pass with amendments and requesting referral to Ways and Means. (Printed A-Engrossed.)

Vote: 5-0-1-0

Yeas: 5 - Linthicum, Manning Jr, President Wagner, Thatcher, Woods

Exc: 1 - Gorsek

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

Prepared By: Beverly Schoonover, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 3/23, 4/4

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Directs the Oregon Water Resources Department (Department) to collaborate with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the State of Washington to implement the Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategic Plan (Plan). Declares it to be the legislature’s intent that Oregon shares in the cost of implementing the Plan and that at least one-half of total costs of plan implementation will be funded through federal, private, or other nonstate sources. Authorizes state agencies to plan and fund projects implementing the Plan that are partially or wholly in the State of Washington if the project benefits instream, out-of-stream, or ground water demands in Oregon. Directs the Department to use an integrated water resources approach to develop water supply solutions that provide benefits to instream, out-of-stream, and ground water uses and addresses a variety of resource and ecosystem issues consistent with the Plan. Directs Department, in consultation with the tribes and in cooperation with Washington, to assess the development of a legal and regulatory framework for allocation, distribution, and management of developed water resources. Requires the Department to report to the Walla Walla River Basin advisory committee three times in 2024 and three times in 2025 prior to deadline to report to legislative committee on legal and regulatory framework. Directs Department to submit a report to a legislative committee related to water with recommendations for legal and regulatory framework on or before June 30, 2025.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Current water use in the Walla Walla Basin
- Examples of water management activities in the Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategic Plan
- Ancestral and cultural importance of salmon to the Confederate Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Technical questions and estimated costs of implementing plan

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

Replaces “Water Resources Commission” (Commission) with “Water Resources Department” (WRD) throughout measure. Directs WRD to implement and use an integrated water “approach” instead of “strategy.” Authorizes state agencies to plan and fund projects implementing the Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategic Plan that are partially or wholly in the State of Washington if the project benefits instream, out-of-stream, or ground water demands in Oregon. Removes Commission authority to issue water right permits and certificates to projects under the Plan consistent with state water laws. Adds requirement that WRD report to the Walla Walla River Basin advisory committee three times in 2024 and three times in 2025 prior to deadline to report to legislative committee on legal and regulatory framework.

BACKGROUND:

The Walla Walla Basin encompasses an area of 1,760 square miles and drains into the Columbia River. Approximately two-thirds of the watershed is in Washington and one-third of the basin is in Oregon, primarily in Umatilla County. The watershed serves as important fish and wildlife habitat, is a source of drinking and municipal water, and agricultural irrigation accounts for much of surface and ground water use.

The Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategic Plan (2021) lays out a 30-year effort to improve water flow and water supplies in the Walla Walla Basin. The Washington Department of Ecology-Office of Columbia River, the Walla Walla Water Management Partnership, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Oregon Department of Water Resources, local governments in both Washington and Oregon, community members and other stakeholders developed recommendations for the Plan.

Senate Bill 956 A directs the Water Resources Department to collaborate with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the State of Washington to implement and guide cooperative, bi-state water management in the Walla Walla Basin under the Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategic Plan. The measure declares legislative intent that Oregon will share in the cost of implementing recommended actions in the strategic plan.