



**Testimony of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
House Bill 3164**

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water

March 2, 2023

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens, my name is Lisa Ganuelas and I am a member of the Board of Trustees for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

I am here today to ask you for your support for House Bill 3164. This bill represents a clear win-win for water users and rivers. It will make permanent split-season water leasing, a tried-and-true tool for collaborative streamflow restoration. The flexibility it affords enables water right holders to both maintain their livelihoods and help restore our fisheries.

These fisheries have been sacred to the culture and traditions of the Tribes since time immemorial. They are central to exercising the rights reserved to us in our Treaty of 1855. However, today, many of these fisheries have been pushed to the brink of extinction by the over-allocation of water and depletion of instream flows. Despite this fact, we have been working tirelessly to overcome these challenges and restore our fisheries. Split-season leasing is key to the success of this work.

With split-season leasing, an agricultural producer can irrigate during the beginning of the season to get their first two cuttings of hay and make ends meet. Then, late in the summer, they can legally protect their water instream so it's there for the fish when they need it most. Federal, state, and private funding is available to provide compensation for this, and the payments water users can get for leaving their water instream often are more than they'd get for that third cutting of hay. Losing this flexibility would hurt both agriculture as well as our state's fisheries and those who depend upon them.

Since the legislature first established the split-season leasing authority more than 20 years ago, this tool has become essential to working together with the agricultural community to restore instream flows. Our efforts to re-establish fisheries in the Walla Walla, Grande Ronde, and Wallowa are critically dependent upon this important tool, which provides flows during the late summer when returning salmon need it most. Without this important tool, our restoration efforts in these basins will falter.

Split-season leasing has demonstrated that, if we work together, we can have both a thriving agricultural community and a thriving river community—but we must be equipped with the right tools. With this legislation, you have the opportunity to ensure that we are.

I thank you for your time today, and ask for your support for this important bill.