

**March 23, 2023**

**Testimony before the Oregon Senate Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal & World Affairs.**

**From: Nathan Rea and Dennis Rea, of Milton Freewater, Oregon**

**Subject: Support of SB 956-2**

Chair Manning and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 956-2 and the -2 amendment. I want to especially thank Senator Bill Hansell for introducing this important legislation.

I represent our fourth-generation family farm based in Milton Freewater, Oregon in the Walla Walla Valley. We farm irrigated and non-irrigated wheat, corn, sunflowers, frozen peas, and other legumes in both states for our family and a dozen other engaged landowners.

The Walla Walla Basin has experienced problems balancing surface water demands for fish and farmers for decades, and now there is growing concern around declining groundwater aquifer levels. With the leadership of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD), and the Washington Department of Ecology Office of Columbia River, our basin has a bi-state strategic plan well underway called the Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategic Plan.

I have the pleasure of serving as an alternate representative of the agriculture water users on the Basin Advisory Committee assisting in the implementation of the Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategic Plan. Senate bill 956-2 and the -2 amendment before you today are paramount to the success of the 2050 Strategic Plan as it will:

- 1) direct OWRD to work with the State of Washington, the Tribes, and local stakeholders to develop a bi-state water management framework for the allocation, distribution, and management of developed water in the Walla Walla Basin; and

- 2) signal the intent of the State of Oregon to share in the cost of implementing the Strategic Plan – something to which Washington has already committed.

My father Dennis and I are also participating in a collaborative called Washington Oregon Water – or WOW – made up of a diverse spectrum of farmers, viticulturalists and...get this...a “renewable and sustainability pathfinder.” The WOW group has been working alongside the 2050 process to help unite water users around the common vision of achieving the optimal ecological health of rivers for the fish while providing dependable and affordable water for irrigation. WOW has submitted written testimony for the record in support of this legislation.

The Oregon legislature has a great opportunity starting with this legislation and the -2 amendment to show strong support for what will be one of the most unique and proactive efforts to implement a bi-state water management solution that achieves multiple goals for the basin’s ecological and economic future for many generations to come.

We urge the Committee to support SB 956 and pass the bill with the -2 amendment.

Thank you for your time, your help, and your consideration.

~Nathan Rea