



**Testimony of the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council
In Support of Senate Bill 761**

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

February 6, 2025

Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the Committee,

My name is Troy Baker, and I am the Executive Director of the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council. I appreciate the opportunity to voice my strong support for Senate Bill 761.

As a watershed council dedicated to restoring and protecting the ecological health of the Walla Walla Basin, we recognize the urgent need for cooperative, science-based water management. SB 761 represents a crucial step forward in implementing the Walla Walla Water 2050 Plan, a plan built through years of collaboration among local landowners, conservationists, water users, the states of Oregon and Washington, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Our watershed council has been at the forefront of restoration efforts in the basin, implementing projects that improve fish habitat, restore critical streamflows, recharge groundwater, and enhance water quality. However, despite our progress, we continue to face significant challenges. The Walla Walla Basin remains a system under stress, where water shortages threaten fish, farms, and communities alike.

SB 761 builds upon the important foundation laid by Senator Hansell and Representative Levy with last year's passage of SB 1567, which aligned Oregon and Washington in their commitment to cooperative water management in the basin. Now, with Washington committing \$2.5 million to implement Walla Walla 2050 projects, Oregon has the opportunity to do the same. This investment will allow us to take meaningful action to enhance instream flows, support sustainable agriculture, and advance habitat restoration efforts that are essential to the long-term resilience of our watershed.

It is important to emphasize that the Walla Walla Basin has aggressively pursued funding through Oregon's existing programs, including the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD), and other existing programs. Our council has successfully secured grants from these sources, allowing us to implement valuable restoration and conservation projects. However, these existing funding programs alone are

insufficient to address the scale of challenges facing our basin. The level of investment required to achieve the long-term water security and ecological resilience envisioned in the Walla Walla 2050 Plan exceeds what these sources can provide. SB 761 is necessary because it represents a more comprehensive, sustained commitment to the basin's future that matches the scale of need with the scale of action.

Over the years, our council has worked closely with landowners and community members to implement projects demonstrating collaboration's power in achieving ecological and economic benefits. We have seen firsthand how strategic investments in water conservation and habitat restoration can yield results, and we are ready to put additional resources to work in service of our shared vision.

Senate Bill 761 is not just about funding but about fulfilling a commitment to a balanced, sustainable future for the Walla Walla Basin. By supporting this bill, you reinforce the idea that we are strongest when working together across boundaries, jurisdictions, and interests.

We urge you to pass SB 761 and help Oregon meet its commitment to the Walla Walla 2050 Watershed Strategy.

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