



February 7, 2025

Senator James Manning, Jr., Chair
Senator Kim Thatcher, Vice-Chair
Senate Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs

Re: Support for Senate Bill 761 with forthcoming “-1” Amendment (Walla Walla River)

Dear Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

Trout Unlimited (TU) is a non-profit dedicated to conserving cold-water fish (such as trout, salmon, and steelhead) and their habitats. TU has more than 350,000 members and supporters nationwide, including thousands of members in Oregon.

Trout Unlimited supports Senate Bill 761 with the forthcoming “-1” Amendment described in your Committee’s February 6th public hearing.

The Walla Walla River is a tributary of the Columbia River. Its headwaters are located in the Blue Mountains of northeast Oregon, and the river flows north and west across the state line into Washington before entering the Columbia.

Native fish species in the Walla Walla River, including summer steelhead, migrate across state lines. At different points in their life cycles, those fish may inhabit Oregon or Washington portions of the watershed (for example, a summer steelhead born in the Oregon headwaters would migrate through Washington to the Pacific Ocean, then return as an adult through Washington and into Oregon). For many years, the unique geography and fish management issues in the Walla Walla presented hurdles for efforts such as instream flow restoration and legally protecting water instream across state lines.

TU testified in support of the 2023 and 2024 bills related to bi-state management of the Walla Walla basin. In passing SB 1567 (2024), the Legislature set the foundation for implementing projects that legally protect water instream across the Washington state line to benefit fish and water quality.

Our understanding is that a forthcoming “-1” amendment to SB 761 would establish a 10-year pilot program under ORS 537.348 to allow irrigation districts in the Walla Walla River basin to temporarily transfer irrigation water rights to instream use on a split-rate basis, with requirements for real-time measurement and reporting. TU supports the concept of such a “-1” amendment.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments, and please let me know if you have questions.

Sincerely,

James Fraser
Oregon Policy Director
Trout Unlimited
james.fraser@tu.org