

SB 761 Written Testimonial
February 4th, 2025

Dear Chair Manning Jr., Vice Chair Thatcher and Honorable Members of the Committee,

We are pleased to share our support for the SB 761 and 2050 Water Plan because we believe that we share many common objectives. We hope to collaborate on ways that we may access our cabins while also improving the water quality of the Upper South Fork Walla Walla River.

On the South Fork of the Walla Walla River there are four privately owned parcels located approximately 3.8 miles above Harris Park. These land(s) collectively make up 90 acres and have cabins on them, most of these are considered second homes with mailing addresses. These properties were homesteaded in the early 1900's, many of which have been passed down for generations. Historically, there was unlimited full size vehicle access to these cabins until 1993. From 1993 until 2020 vehicle access to these cabins was limited to a 6-week window due to changes in land management, bridge removals, and environmental concerns. After the removal of bridges, cabin owners had to ford (cross) the Walla Walla River 16 times to reach their cabins, which was not ideal for us or the river.

In early 2020 there was a 100-year flood event that occurred which caused damage to the trail system as well as the private road that cabin owners were allowed to use for vehicle access. With BLM approval we worked to repair the road in the summer of 2020. Following the end of the access window in August 2020, we received notice that private road access was prohibited until further notice. The South Fork Walla Walla River Trail #3225 has not been repaired and remains impassable. To date, private road access has not been available to use and there are no alternative routes to access these cabins.

Over the past 30 years we have spent tens of thousands of dollars on environmental assessments, attorney fees and countless hours of writing letters and meeting with government agencies. In these correspondences to BLM, we offered suggestions; private funding for small-scale bridges, private funds for upgrading the trail system. We never gave up on the desire to access our private property in hopes that something would eventually change.

After exhausting all options, we (cabin owners and our families) made a collective decision to purchase the adjoining property that abuts the borders of the cabin properties. While this required considerable expense on our part, we believe there is an opportunity to create a road to the cabins through this newly acquired property that could eliminate the need to cross the Walla Walla River in a vehicle. This would help ensure the water quality in the river remains pristine and would allow us to once again access our properties in this cherished watershed.

We are stewards of this area and have a deep respect for this land and river. We want to continue to preserve and take care of it for many more generations to come. We are grateful the Walla Walla 2050 Plan recognized this as a collaboration solution to a long-standing problem, and hope that we have finally found a way forward for both the river and our families.

Thank you for your efforts, time and consideration.

Sincerely,

The following cabin owners on the South Fork of the Walla Walla River:

- Chad and Susan Dombrosky
- John and Bonnie Ehart
- Jack and Lori Wallace
- Larry Widner