

Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council Meeting
October 20, 2025
Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Board Members: James Baker, Jerimiah Bonifer, Jeff Catlin, Ed Chesnut, Jeff Ferrise, Joel Huesby, Ralph Perkins, Vern Rodighiero, John Zerba, Kevin Scribner (Zoom)

Staff: Michelle McClellan, Wendy Harris, Sara Harris, Graham Banks, Tara Patten, Luke Adams, Eric Hoverson, Cat Garza

Guest(s): Mark Medina (Zoom)

(7:00 PM) Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair John Zerba.

(7:05) Approval of September Meeting Minutes

- The September 18, 2025 meeting minutes were reviewed.
 - Motion: Ralph Perkins moved to approve the minutes.
 - Second: Ed Chesnut
 - Vote: Motion passed unanimously.

(7:10) Project & Staff Updates

- Monitoring Steelhead Use of Restoration Projects - Cat Garza
 - The team conducted summer monitoring of fish species in restored stream reaches, capturing data and observations that will help evaluate the effectiveness of restoration projects.
 - Cat discussed the various monitoring methods and protocols used, including survey techniques and calibration methods.
 - Surveys included Redd counts, snorkel observations, and habitat assessments.
 - Species observed included steelhead, redband trout, dace, Chinook salmon, sculpin, and amphibians.
 - Eric Hoverson discussed field results; Tara Patten noted next year's monitoring plans.
- Wildlife Field Day – Graham Banks
 - Held October 2, 2025 at Target Meadows, with all Milton-Freewater 5th grade classes.
 - Federal partners unable to attend due to government shutdown; Oregon Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) staff filled in.
 - Activities included watershed hikes, predator–prey art, and “Toothpick Predators” with data collection.
 - Wendy Harris and Sara Harris shared reflections on student engagement and volunteer support.

- WWU Fall Service Day – Tara Patten
 - Planting day (willow, dogwood, cottonwood) at Tom Buell Ponds (Upper Dry Creek watershed) on October 15, 2025 with 12 Walla Walla University students and a faculty lead.
 - The event was supported by a small OWEB grant focused on erosion control and water quality.

- Aquifer Recharge Update – Tara Patten
 - Limited license application still under ODFW review; delays due in part to staff capacity constraints at the agency.
 - WWBWC staff are compiling data for water availability analysis and bypass flow compliance.
 - Coordination is ongoing with the Oregon Water Resources Dept. (OWRD) and ODFW related to measurable recharge goals and long-term water rights.
 - Discussion ensued about a revised monitoring framework and engagement with irrigation districts.

- WWBWC Tri-Sovereigns Feedback Session – Michelle McClellan
 - Michelle announced that Michelle, Tara, and Ralph Perkins would be participating in a feedback session with Tri-Sovereign representatives about implementation of the Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategy and the Basin Advisory Council.

- Umatilla County Weed Board – Michelle McClellan
 - County Weed Supervisor Teddy Orr is interested in re-forming the defunct Umatilla County Weed Control Board and is seeking at least five members representing communities across the county.

(7:55) Stream Flow and Drought Report – Luke Adams

- Luke Adams provided stream flow data (September 17-October 17):
 - South Fork: 93 CFS
 - North Fork: 6.7 CFS
 - Walla Walla River (15th Ave): 110 CFS
 - Mill Creek: 31 CFS
 - Pine Creek and Couse Creek: Dry
- 2025 water year total ~170,000 acre-feet (107% of median).
- Persistent drought conditions (D2–D3) in eastern Walla Walla and Umatilla counties.
- Tributary data show earlier low-flow periods (April-May) consistent with climate model projections.
- The Board discussed historical flow comparisons, irrigation effects, and habitat implications.

(8:17) Strategic Action Plan Update – Michelle McClellan

- All SAP Committee feedback has been incorporated into a revised draft and that document is being reviewed by key partners across the Basin.

- The goal remains to incorporate partner feedback into a final, revised draft to be reviewed and voted on at the December Council meeting.

(8:19) Announcements and Closing

- BAC Open House
 - October 21, 4:00-8:00 PM, Reid Campus Center (Whitman College)
- BAC Policy, Funding, and Outreach Workgroup
 - October 28, 10:00 AM-12:00 PM (Zoom)
- WWBWC Board Meeting
 - November 17, 2025, 7:00-8:30 PM (hybrid)

(8:21 PM) Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:21 PM.