

Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council Meeting
January 26, 2026
Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

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

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

Guest(s): Jane Dalling

(7:00 PM) Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair John Zerba. A quorum was present.

(7:05) Business

- The December 2025 meeting minutes were reviewed.
 - One amendment was suggested to clarify that the Board formed a Nominating Committee for the January officer elections; Ralph Perkins, Joel Huesby, and John Zerba volunteered to serve on the committee.
 - Motion: Ed Chesnut moved to approve the minutes as amended.
 - Second: Ralph Perkins
 - Vote: Motion passed unanimously.
- Board Nominations
 - On behalf of the Nominating Committee, Ralph Perkins presented the following slate of officers:
 - President: James Baker
 - Vice President: Kevin Scribner
 - Secretary/Treasurer: Ed Chesnut
 - No additional nominations were offered.
 - Motion: Joel Huesby moved to close nominations and elect the slate by unanimous ballot.
 - Second: Ralph Perkins
 - Vote: Motion passed unanimously.
- Five-Year Strategic Action Plan
 - Michelle McClellan reminded the Board that she had shared the final draft of the 2026-2030 Strategic Action Plan (SAP) with them via email and invited reflections about the planning process from SAP Committee members.
 - Board members expressed strong support for the plan, noting the clarity, structure, and extensive collaboration involved in its development.
 - Minor typographical corrections were identified.
 - Motion: Ed Chesnut moved to adopt the Strategic Action Plan with the corrections.
 - Second: Ralph Perkins
 - Vote: Motion passed unanimously.

(7:20) 2026 Budget Overview

- Wendy Harris presented an overview of secured and pending funding for 2026. Highlights included:
 - \$3.22 million in secured grant funding.
 - Approximately \$600,000 increase compared to the prior year.
 - Continued upward funding trend over the past six years.
- Pending grants and anticipated revenue were reviewed, including Salmon-Safe, Umatilla County, and Walla Walla Water 2050 funding.
- Wendy also reviewed projected expenses, personnel costs, and a projected \$1.74 million carryover, noting that some funds are tied to multi-year projects.
- A brief discussion followed regarding staffing capacity, funding reliability, and long-term planning.

(7:35) Recharge Update

- Tara Patten provided an update on managed aquifer recharge (MAR), including:
 - Status of the Limited License application.
 - New findings from the Jacobs Engineering water availability analysis.
 - Implications of less legally available winter water.
 - Shift in recharge objectives from long-term ecological benefits toward water supply resilience.
- Short-term next steps include continued pursuit of the Limited License, potential limited operations in spring 2026, and revised framing of recharge goals.
- Long-term considerations include alignment with the Walla Walla Water 2050 Implementation Plan and future policy discussions regarding winter water allocation.
- Board members discussed the importance of continued engagement, coordination with regional partners, and realistic expectations given current water availability constraints.

(7:55) Big Basin Issues Check-In

- Michelle McClellan facilitated a review of the Big Basin Issues List:
 - Staff and Board “point persons” were identified for key issue areas to improve tracking, accountability, and communication.
 - Several issue categories were clarified, consolidated, or renamed, including updates to terminology related to the “2050 Anchor Project.” Board members expressed support for this approach and emphasized the importance of cross-walking the list with the Strategic Action Plan.

(8:05) Flow, Water Temperature, and Springs Data Report

- Luke Adams presented recent flow measurements, spring monitoring results, snowpack conditions, and drought indicators. Key points included:
 - Mixed spring responses, with several sites showing reduced or intermittent flows.
 - Snowpack currently at approximately 38% of the median.
 - Ongoing moderate to severe drought conditions across the basin.
- Board members discussed implications for recharge, water management, and long-term climate trends.

(8:20) Announcements and Closing

- Valley Giving Guide
 - Sara Harris reported that the 2025 campaign raised \$14,283 from 22 donors, more than twice the previous year's total.
- Next Council Meeting
 - February 23, 2026, 7:00-8:30 PM (moved due to federal holiday on 2/16), Milton Freewater Community Building
 - A reception honoring John Zerba and Vern Rodighero will precede the meeting.
- BAC Meeting
 - January 28, 2026, 1:00-4:00 PM, WWCC Water & Environmental Center (hybrid)
- Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Workshop
 - January 29, 2026, 7:30 AM-1:00 PM, Milton Freewater Community Building

(8:26 PM) Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 PM.