

Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council Meeting
February 23, 2026
Meeting Minutes – Approved

Attendees:

Board Members: James Baker, Jeremiah Bonifer, Ed Chesnut, Caty Clifton, Jack Ferrise, Joel Huesby, Steve Irving, Mark Medina, Ralph Perkins, Kevin Scribner, John Zerba

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

Guest(s): Jane Dalling, Anton Chiono (CTUIR), Brook Beeler (DOE, via Zoom)

(7:00 PM) Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair James Baker. A quorum was present.

(7:05) Business

- The January 2026 meeting minutes were reviewed.
 - Motion: Joel Huesby moved to approve the minutes as amended.
 - Second: Ed Chesnut
 - Vote: Motion passed unanimously.

- Board member resignation / Staffing update
 - Chair James Baker announced that Jeff Catlin submitted his resignation from the Board of Directors after accepting the position of Fiscal and Operations Specialist with the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council.
 - The Fiscal and Operations Specialist responsibilities will be distributed to the board at a later date.

(7:15) WW Water 2050 Strategy Overview – Anton Chiono (CTUIR) & Brook Beeler (DOE)

- Anton Chiono and Brook Beeler presented an overview of the Walla Walla Water 2050 planning effort and implementation framework.
- Board members discussed the relationship between the Council's work and the broader basin strategy, including the importance of coordinating among partners and maintaining clear communication with local communities.

(7:50) Staff Updates

- Endowment update
 - Michelle McClellan announced that the Council has exceeded the minimum amount required for the endowment fund at the Blue Mountain Community Foundation, two years ahead of the deadline.

- Board sector representation
 - Michelle McClellan explained findings from her and Wendy Harris' research into WWBWC's manner for achieving diverse sector representation, following up on questions raised at the December Council meeting.

- The sector designations WWBWC has been using are not specified in the Council's bylaws, not mandated by Umatilla County, and not required in state legislation. Based on consultation with Umatilla County legal counsel, the Council does not need to rigidly adhere to those sector designations, though they may still serve as a useful framework for WWBWC for recruiting and pursuing diverse representation on the Board.
- University of Idaho project @ Mill Creek / Tiger Mill: WWBWC Role
 - Tara Patten introduced a potential collaboration with a team from the University of Idaho that arose shortly before the Council meeting and therefore had not been vetted by the Project Committee. Since the team is working under a tight timeline to submit a grant proposal (to Allen Family Philanthropies), WWBWC staff brought the opportunity directly to the Board for consideration.
 - The team from the University of Idaho is leading a research project in partnership with other universities and U.S. Forest Service research stations to develop a decision-support modeling tool related to forest management activities, such as thinning and prescribed burns, that in the case of the Tiger Mill project have already been approved through required environmental review.
 - The Council is invited to support stakeholder and community engagement, and water quality monitoring.
 - Board members discussed the opportunity, potential risks, and the appropriate role for WWBWC.
 - Motion: Joel Huesby motioned to allow participation in the University of Idaho project as presented.
 - Seconded: Kevin Scribner
 - Vote: Motion passed unanimously
 - Following discussion, an amendment was proposed.
 - Amendment: Ralph Perkins proposed an amendment giving the Executive Director final authority to decide yes/no to participate.
 - Second: Kevin Scribner
 - Vote to approve the motion as amended: Passed unanimously
 - Board members noted that the project proposal is still under development and that the Council's participation would depend on the final scope and feasibility.
 - Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR)
 - Tara Patten provided a brief update on Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) activities, including ongoing work related to permitting, coordination with partners, and potential next steps for recharge implementation.
 - Motion: James Baker motioned to approve establishment of a special recharge committee with the option of community member involvement but not as a requirement for decision making.
 - Second: Joel Huesby
 - Vote: Passed unanimously

(8:30) Stream Flow Report

- With no time remaining for the stream flow report, Michelle McClellan suggested that Luke email his presentation slides and data to board members following the meeting.

(8:32) Announcements and Closing

- WWBWC Fiscal/Education Committee Meeting
 - February 25, 12:00–1:00 PM – WWBWC Office
- City of Walla Walla Municipal Watershed Resiliency Working Group
 - February 25, 9:00–11:00 AM – Hybrid meeting
- Walla Walla Water 2050 Basin Advisory Committee (BAC)
 - February 25, 1:00–4:00 PM – Water & Environmental Center (Hybrid)
- Dry Creek & Lower Pine Creek Landowner Engagement Meeting
 - March 5, 5:00–7:00 PM – Milton-Freewater Community Building
- BAC Policy, Funding & Outreach Workgroup Meeting
 - March 10, 1:00–3:00 PM – Zoom

(8:36 PM) Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 PM.