

Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council Meeting
April 20, 2026
Meeting Minutes (approved)

Attendees:

Board Members: James Baker, Ed Chesnut, Caty Clifton, Joel Huesby, Mark Medina, Ralph Perkins, Kevin Scribner, John Zerba

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

Guest(s): Jean Dolling, Kyle Waggoner (Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District, via Zoom), Alexis Spencer (Mill Creek resident, via Zoom)

(7:00 PM) Call to Order

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

(7:01) Business

- March 2026 meeting minutes
 - Motion: Ralph Perkins moved to approve the minutes.
 - Second: Kevin Scribner
 - Vote: Motion passed unanimously.

- Registered Agent Change
 - James Baker announced that John Zerba resigned as WWBWC's registered agent and James will replace him. Per official instructions, John notified the Oregon Office of the Secretary of State and staff submitted a change of registered agent form.

- June Council Meeting
 - Tentatively, the June Council meeting will take place at CTUIR's Imtwaha Fish Hatchery on the South Fork during business hours, with an optional tour before the meeting. Additional details will be provided once finalized.

(7:10) Mill Creek Flood Discussion & Landowner Support

- **Presentation & Discussion – Kyle Waggoner, Umatilla SWCD**
 - Kyle Waggoner, District Manager for the Umatilla Soil and Water Conservation District, discussed the organization's role in flood recovery coordination following a recent high flow event on the Oregon side of Mill Creek.
 - Kyle explained that the 2020 flood substantially altered Mill Creek channel conditions, contributing to the severity of the recent flooding.

Permitting & Policy Discussion

- Discussion focused on the increasing cost and complexity of emergency permitting and flood recovery work in Essential Fish Habitat streams.

- Recent permit fee increases and fish salvage requirements can create major financial barriers for landowners responding to flood damage.
 - Board members discussed the need for better coordination, technical support, and long-term restoration approaches that balance infrastructure protection, landowner needs, and fish habitat requirements.
- **Presentation – Kevin Scribner, WWBWC Vice Chair**
 - Kevin shared photographs and observations documenting changes to Mill Creek before and after the 2020 and 2026 flood events.
 - Presentation topics included:
 - channel migration,
 - erosion of county roads,
 - impacts to private property and infrastructure,
 - repeated road damage,
 - stream restoration challenges in constrained canyon environments.

Discussion

- Discussion focused on channel migration, floodplain processes, and the challenges of balancing infrastructure protection with natural river dynamics.
- It was noted that future restoration and flood recovery efforts will need to account for changing climate conditions, increased flood risk, and physical constraints within the Mill Creek canyon.
- Additional discussion emphasized the importance of long-term planning, coordination, and understanding how stream processes affect both landowners and habitat conditions.

(7:45) Policy Discussion – James Baker, Chair; Michelle McClellan, Executive Director

- **Proposed Bylaw Revisions**
 - James introduced proposed revisions to the WWBWC bylaws for Board review prior to a planned vote at the May meeting.
 - Michelle reviewed several of the proposed changes, including:
 - separating the Fiscal/Education Committee into two distinct committees;
 - separating the Secretary/Treasurer position into separate Secretary and Treasurer officer positions; and
 - expanding the Executive Committee structure accordingly.

Discussion

- Caty Clifton suggested revising attendance language to allow flexibility for Board members experiencing illness, family emergencies, or other reasonable circumstances.
- James Baker proposed exploring opportunities to create shorter-term Board positions for college students or interns to encourage youth participation and leadership development.

- **Standalone Conflict of Interest Policy**
 - James introduced a draft standalone Conflict of Interest Policy, previously vetted by the Executive Committee, for Board review prior to a planned vote at the May meeting.

(8:05) Flow Report – Luke Adams, Project Manager – Monitoring

- **Streamflow Conditions**
 - Luke provided streamflow updates for the period March 18 through April 17.
 - Additional field measurements were collected throughout the basin during recent high flow events.
- **High Flow & Channel Movement**
 - Luke discussed channel migration observed at several monitoring locations, including the Walla Walla River below Tumulum Bridge.
 - Many gaging locations required adjustments due to shifting channels.
- **Snowpack & Drought Conditions**
 - Basin snowpack is at approximately 29% of median.

Current drought conditions:

- Most of Umatilla County remains in Severe Drought (D2).
- Much of Walla Walla County remains in Moderate Drought (D1).

Long-range forecasts indicate:

- Above-normal temperatures
- Below-normal precipitation
- Continued drought persistence through early Summer

(8:20 PM) Announcements & Closing

- **Water Quality Partner Award**
 - Michelle announced that WWBWC was presented with the 2026 Water Quality Partner Award at the OCEAN Connect+ Conference in Seaside, Oregon. The award recognized watershed stewardship efforts, including Dry Creek and Pine Creek restoration work.
- **WWBWC Open House**
 - Staff reminded Board members about the upcoming WWBWC Open House scheduled for May 20 from 4:00–7:00 PM.
- **Public Comment**
 - Jane Dolling shared reflections regarding river dynamics, floodplain processes, and the challenges of managing rivers while working within natural physical processes and constraints.

(8:29 PM) Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned at 8:29 PM by Chair James Baker.