THE WATERSHED WATCH

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CONTACT US!

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info@wwbwc.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Water & Wine Series

March 25, 2025, 5:00pm

Echolands, 3281 Mill Creek Rd, Walla Walla, WA 99362

Click flier to learn more

Pub Trivia

April 9, 2025, 6:00pm-8:00pm

Walla Walla Beer Parlor 14 W Main St, Walla Walla, WA 99362

Click flier to learn more

Water & Wine Series

April 16, 2025, 5:00pm

Doubleback Winery, 33853 Powerline Rd, Walla Walla, WA 99362

Click flier to learn more

WWBWC MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

April 21, 2025, 7:00pm-8:30pm

810 S Main St, Milton Freewater, OR 97862

RETURN TO THE RIVER SALMON FESTIVAL

May 17, 2025, 11:00am-3:00pm

By the WWCC ballfields along Tausick Way!
Walla Walla, WA 99362

STEELHEAD SURVEYS

Monitoring Fish Populations

The Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council (WWBWC) has begun conducting steelhead surveys in an effort to understand the spawning success of steelhead in the basin. As steelhead return to their spawning grounds, our survey crew will wade the North Fork Walla Walla River and Couse Creek, monitoring fish populations by counting redds – the nests steelhead create to lay their eggs.

By using their tails, steelhead dig depressions in the gravels of stream beds and deposit their eggs. Once the eggs are fertilized, they cover them with loose gravel for protection and stay nearby to guard them. These redds stand out as patches of clean, lighter-colored gravel against the darker riverbed, making them identifiable for our surveyors. By counting redds, WWBWC can assess the suitability of these streams for Mid-Columbia River steelhead, a population listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

WWBWC has implemented numerous restoration projects in these streams to improve habitat for summer steelhead, bull trout, spring Chinook salmon, and Pacific lamprey. Through these surveys, we hope to see not only an increase in available habitat but also evidence that these species are actively using and benefiting from our restoration efforts.

Redd surveys began in February and will continue through May, covering the active spawning period for steelhead. As the winter flows subside, and water temperatures rise, our crew will transition to snorkel surveys from May through July, allowing us to monitor juvenile fish as they seek out deep, remaining pools to grow over the summer. During these lower stream flows, juvenile fish rely on isolated pockets of deep water to survive the hot summer months. Our restoration projects aim to have increased the number of these high-quality pools,

providing the habitat these fish need to grow, before heading to the Pacific Ocean – where, two years later, they will hopefully return to repeat the cycle.

As we continue these surveys, we look forward to gaining valuable insights into the health of steelhead populations and the effectiveness of our restoration efforts. Each redd we count and each juvenile fish we observe brings us closer to understanding how we can best support these threatened species. By restoring habitat and monitoring fish returns, we are working toward a future where steelhead and other native fish can thrive in the Walla Walla Basin for generations to come.

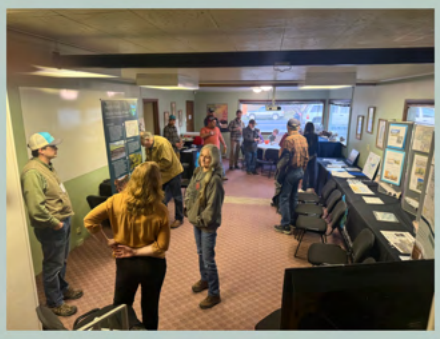
DRY CREEK & LOWER PINE CREEK ASSESSMENT

This fall, the WWBWC will conduct a stream survey and assessment of Dry Creek and Lower Pine Creek. In February, we hosted a landowner meeting to discuss current watershed concerns and historical changes. The primary issue raised was the decline in groundwater levels, which is reducing water availability, forcing many to dig deeper wells, and negatively impacting streamflow.

Many landowners expressed interest in projects that slow water velocity and retain water on the landscape, such as rain-fed upland ponds, riparian plantings, and instream structures. These strategies can help reduce erosion, store water for longer periods, and recharge groundwater by allowing more infiltration into floodplains.

A key goal of the stream survey, scheduled for fall 2025, is to establish baseline data. This information will help track changes in Dry Creek over time and assess the effectiveness of future restoration efforts.

If you'd like more information about the survey, meeting, or potential projects, please reach out to Cat Garza at cat.garza@wwbwc.org or 509-520-5630.



HYDROLOGIC TREND MONITORING IN THE WALLA WALLA BASIN

The Walla Walla Valley River Basin is approximately 1,760 square miles, with an underlying shallow alluvial aquifer of 200 square miles. Many farmers, businesses, and residents use water from the shallow aquifer making it a highly important source of water for Walla Walla Valley. In addition to supplying wells with groundwater, the shallow aquifer also feeds the springs, streams, and rivers of the Walla Walla Basin. The high connectivity between the shallow aquifer and surface water bodies is important in enhancing base flow and, during the summer, cooling water temperatures for threatened salmonid species in the Walla Walla River Basin. The Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council monitoring program comprises of collecting and analyzing streamflow data, groundwater elevation data, and water temperature data.

Water Temperature Monitoring

The WWBWC began its monitoring efforts back in 1999 with collecting water temperature data in the Walla Walla River from the Oregon/Washington border up to Harris Park on the South Fork Walla Walla River. Today, the WWBWC has expanded water temperature monitoring up to the headwaters of the South Fork Walla Walla River at Deduct Spring and now consists of over 25 monitoring locations.The monitoring goals are to collect the peak summertime water temperature data and identify trends if the peaks are stable, increasing or decreasing over time.

Water temperature data is available to the public on our website at wwbwc.org/monitoring/water-temperature-monitoring.

Streamflow Monitoring

The WWBWC began collecting streamflow data back in 2002 on the Walla Walla River, its tributaries, small streams, springs, and irrigation ditches. Today, the WWBWC monitors flow at over 20 locations and almost half of the sites are equipped to provide near real-time data to the public. The WWBWC also has historical data of over 50 streamflow sites both on the Washington and Oregon sides of the basin. The monitoring goals are to collect and provide accurate flow data to water managers and to the public and identify trends if summertime base flows and spring flows are stable, increasing or decreasing over time. Streamflow data is available to the public on our website at **www.wwbwc.org/monitoring/streamflow.**

Groundwater Monitoring

The WWBWC began collecting groundwater elevation data back in 2001 by constructing a community-based network of shallow monitoring wells (250 feet or less) in the Walla Walla Basin.The shallow well monitoring network is a grassroots, community effort led by the WWBWC, and includes both urban and rural wells in and around Milton-Freewater and Umapine. Today, the WWBWC monitors over 60 wells on the Oregon side of the basin.The WWBWC also has historical data of over 120 wells both on the Washington and Oregon sides of the basin.

The monitoring goals are to collect groundwater elevation data, identify trends if the groundwater elevations are stable, increasing or decreasing over time, and if the trend is uniform throughout the basin or vary regionally for the alluvial aquifer. Groundwater data is available to the public on our website at wwbwc.org/groundwater.

The specific problems the monitoring program is intended to inform are elevated temperatures and insufficient flow in the Walla Walla River, declining groundwater elevations, decreased spring performance, and seepage losses and altered hydraulic gradients away from Walla Walla River and its distributary streams and springs.

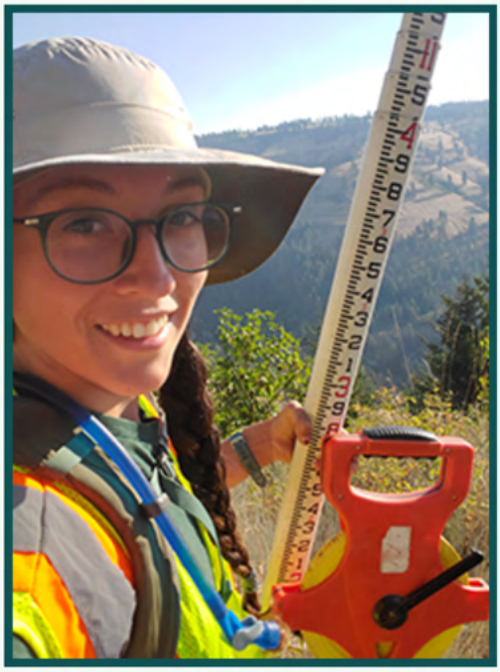
The Walla Walla Watershed is utilized by ESA listed bull trout, summer steelhead, and reintroduced spring Chinook salmon, which are limited by lack of summertime flow and high water temperatures. Monitoring will document current conditions and describe trends to inform development of projects to restore watershed function and increase in-stream flows.

Bi-state efforts to develop strategies to address these limiting factors are underway and include the Walla Walla Water 2050 Project, the Bi-State Flow Enhancement Study, and a basin-wide hydrology study led by USGS. Each of these efforts is utilizing stream flow and groundwater data collected by WWBWC. In order to develop relevant, long-term solutions, there is an ongoing need for current data.

In addition, the flood of 2020 had a dramatic impact on riparian areas in the upper half of the watershed resulting in large reaches of reduced shade. Peak summertime water temperatures measured in 2020 from the confluence of the North and South Forks of the Walla Walla River downstream to the WA state line were notably higher than those measured during the previous 10 years. Additional water temperature monitoring is needed in order to describe the trend and guide future restoration efforts.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Introducing our newest staff members

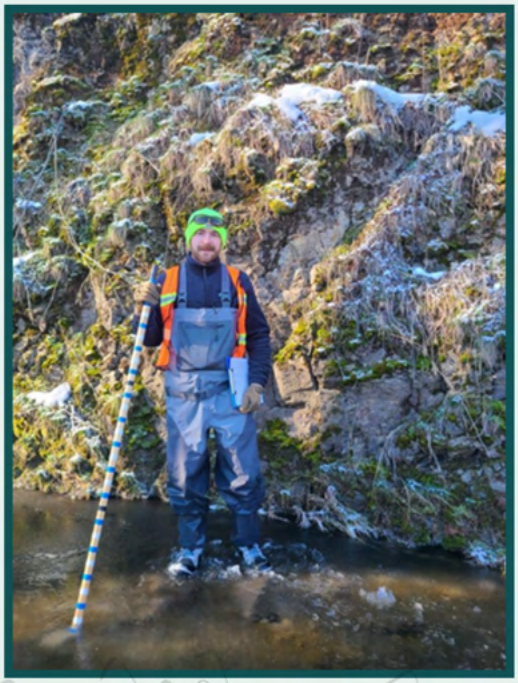


Catalina Garza

Cat joined the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council (WWBWC) in January 2025 as a project manager to support assessment, monitoring, and restoration projects in the Walla Walla Watershed. She has five years of experience in local natural resource conservation projects. Cat grew up on a small farm in Umapine, Oregon, and graduated from McLoughlin High School in 2011. In elementary school, she participated in the WWBWC's educational outreach programs, where she raised Chinook salmon in the classroom for release and helped plant a riparian buffer behind Ferndale School. These experiences ignited her passion for preserving and restoring natural resources. Cat graduated from Walla Walla Community College in 2021 with an associate degree in Plant and Soil Science and is currently pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Agricultural Systems. In her free time, she enjoys kayaking, hiking, and picking huckleberries with her dogs in the summer, skiing in the winter, and spending quality time with her family when she's not off on an adventure.

Colin Meister

Growing up in Walla Walla, WA, Colin spent his formative years exploring the outdoors—fishing, hiking, and camping. With an innate interest in the natural sciences, he earned a B.S. in Fisheries and Wildlife from Oregon State University. After earning his degree, Colin worked on the Oregon Coast as a coordinator for the Smith River Watershed Council (SRWC). While working with SRWC, Colin gained experience designing and implementing in-stream habitat enhancement projects aimed at rehabilitating native coho, steelhead, and Chinook salmon populations. In 2020, he joined the U.S. Air Force and was stationed at Eielson Air Force Base near North Pole, Alaska. During his four years in Alaska, he served on the board of directors for the Tanana Valley Watershed Association, continuing his dedication to fish conservation. Upon his return to the Walla Walla Valley, Colin joined the team at WWBWC as a Watershed Technician.



Thank You for 20 Incredible Years

A message from the Executive Director

After 20 years with the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council (WWBWC), I am stepping away from my role as Executive Director. This decision comes with mixed emotions: gratitude for my incredible journey and excitement for the opportunities ahead.

Since joining the council in 2005 as a Hydro Technician, I have had the privilege of working alongside dedicated staff, board members, landowners, and partners who share a passion for protecting and restoring our watershed. Together, we have tackled complex water resource challenges, built lasting partnerships, and carried out projects that make a real difference for people and the environment.

WWBWC has been more than just a job for me; it has been a place of growth, learning, and meaningful work that I will always cherish. I am incredibly proud of what we've accomplished together, from large-scale restoration and conservation efforts to community engagement programs that have strengthened our collective commitment to the health of our watershed. Though I am moving on, I will always support the council and its mission. The work being done here is vital, and I have no doubt that the dedicated team at WWBWC will continue to lead impactful projects for years to come.

Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this journey. Your support, collaboration, and shared vision have made my time here special. I look forward to seeing how WWBWC continues to grow and evolve into the future.

With gratitude,

Troy Baker

Troy Baker, Executive Director

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