



Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council 2026-2030 Strategic Action Plan Summary

Introduction

For over three decades, the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council (WWBWC) has advanced collaborative, science-based solutions to improve surface and groundwater resources throughout the Walla Walla Basin. During this time, the Council has brought more than \$31 million to the basin to support hydrologic monitoring, habitat restoration, water quality improvements, education programs, and community engagement.

This Strategic Action Plan (SAP) guides WWBWC's work from 2026–2030. It reflects both continuity with long-standing priorities—such as fish recovery, water availability, water quality, and flood risk reduction—and a response to major changes in basin-wide water governance, climate conditions, and community needs. The SAP serves as WWBWC's primary accountability framework to partners, funders, and the public, outlining how staff and the Board of Directors will invest time, expertise, and resources over the next five years.

Basin Context and Governance

The **Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategy** is a shared framework for managing the basin as one connected system. Recent legislation in Washington and Oregon enables cross-border coordination, cost-sharing, and protection of restored instream flows, making it possible to implement solutions that benefit fish, farms, communities, and groundwater across state lines. WWBWC holds a primary and alternate seat on the Environment Caucus of the Basin Advisory Committee and plays a key role in bringing local, non-regulatory leadership to basin-wide planning and implementation.

Operating Area

The Walla Walla Basin spans 1,758 square miles in southeastern Washington and northeastern Oregon, encompassing the Touchet River, Walla Walla River, and Mill Creek subbasins. The basin supports vibrant agricultural communities, growing municipalities, and critical habitat for ESA-listed salmonids. Increasing competition for water, climate-driven changes in flow timing, and groundwater decline underscore the need for coordinated, adaptive management.

Recognition

WWBWC recognizes that its work occurs on the ancestral and ceded lands of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). The Council honors the enduring relationship of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla peoples with the lands and waters of the basin and recognizes the sovereign role of the CTUIR in managing, protecting, and restoring natural resources. WWBWC works alongside the CTUIR to advance shared goals for healthy rivers, thriving ecosystems, and the availability of First Foods for future generations.

Vision and Mission

Vision

We envision a healthy watershed where innovative conservation and collaborative management practices ensure clean, abundant water for native fish and wildlife, farms, and all who live, work, and play in the Walla Walla River basin.

Mission

Our mission is to enhance, restore, and protect the Walla Walla watershed while supporting a sustainable economy.

Core, Cross-Cutting Approaches

WWBWC's work is grounded in three approaches that span all activities:

- **Practicing and supporting adaptive management** through monitoring, evaluation, and data-driven decision making.
 - **Enhancing watershed resilience** to climate-driven impacts such as drought, floods, wildfire, and altered runoff patterns.
 - **Improving watershed literacy** among Board and staff to support informed participation and stewardship.
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Priorities, 2026–2030

PRIORITY 1: Measurable improvements in watershed health

WWBWC is committed to implementing “ridgetop-to-ridgetop” projects that improve hydrologic, ecological, and water quality conditions across diverse landscapes and communities. This includes assessment, restoration, monitoring, and collaborative planning efforts that align with basin-wide strategies and respond to emerging challenges such as groundwater decline and climate change.

Priority 1 Strategies

- Prioritize, plan, and implement assessment, enhancement, and restoration projects throughout the watershed.
- Support and participate in multi-stakeholder planning efforts like Walla Walla Water 2050, promoting progress and providing local leadership for implementation.
- Advance Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) as a water supply solution, combining MAR with water conservation projects where possible to increase efficiency during low flow months while maintaining groundwater levels and limiting or eliminating impacts on surface water systems, groundwater irrigators, and domestic wells.
- Track and support efforts to direct winter flow into the Little Walla Walla River to support beneficial use and stream function.
- Work with the CTUIR, municipal and state agencies, and other partners to reduce or eliminate untreated stormwater into the Walla Walla River.
- Implement and support the adoption of water conservation tools and techniques by municipalities and homeowners.

- Expand the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership (PSP) and/or work with the CTUIR and other partners to integrate activities with broader toxics reduction initiatives.
- Leverage the Salmon-Safe certification program to help more growers, including dryland farmers, adopt Best Management Practices (BMPs) for pesticide use and other voluntary actions to improve water quality.
- Support efforts to improve watershed health and reduce catastrophic wildfire risk in upland forested landscapes.
- Advance adaptive management and sound decision making basin-wide by monitoring hydrological trends and making data accessible to water managers, basin residents, and other interested parties.

PRIORITY 2: Broad support for watershed stewardship

WWBWC recognizes that long-term watershed health depends on informed, engaged communities. The Council will employ targeted, inclusive outreach approaches that reflect the values, concerns, and information needs of diverse basin residents, water users, and partners.

Priority 2 Strategies

- Listen and learn from priority user groups like the CTUIR, irrigators, municipal utilities, rural domestic well owners, and non-traditional partners in watershed stewardship to deepen our understanding of their unique issues and concerns.
- Employ values-based messaging to build trust with and motivate specific user groups, including those historically under-represented in watershed decision making and stewardship.
- Decentralize and personalize messaging by facilitating peer-to-peer (e.g., landowner-to-landowner) communication.
- Reduce barriers to engagement by employing visual storytelling, translating materials into Spanish, and taking related actions to make Council information accessible.
- Offer an array of events and watershed experiences throughout the year that connect people to the Council's work, as capacity allows.
- Position WWBWC Board and staff as experts and thought leaders in areas including water quality and habitat restoration.
- Amplify our partners' messages by sharing their content, with their approval, via WWBWC communication channels.
- Leverage the Basin Advisory Committee Policy, Funding, and Outreach (PFO) workgroup and other venues to share information and insights and plan future educational and outreach programs.

PRIORITY 3: Strong partnerships to accelerate watershed improvements and achieve shared aims

WWBWC depends on strong, trusted partnerships to achieve our mission. By elevating partnerships as a strategic priority, the Council commits to nurturing relationships, sharing resources, and adding value to the collective efforts of basin organizations working toward shared goals.

Priority 3 Strategies

- Identify shared aims and opportunities to support and amplify each other's work.

- Clarify WWBWC's and partners' organizational assets (human, physical, financial, etc.) that could be leveraged to spur, support, or strengthen partnerships.
- Consider ways to share resources, build capacity, and/or create efficiencies among partners involved in similar work.
- Amplify our partners' messages by sharing their content via WWBWC communication channels.
- Grow our capacity to serve as a hub for accurate, up-to-date data and information about watershed issues and resources.
- Support cities, counties, and other entities in helping communities prepare for, respond to, and mitigate the risk of drought, wildfires, and floods.

PRIORITY 4: Thriving educational programs to inspire the watershed stewards of the future

WWBWC views outdoor and watershed education as foundational to long-term stewardship. Over the life of this plan, the Council will assess program capacity, pursue partnerships, and determine the most sustainable path forward for education initiatives that connect youth to the watershed.

Priority 4 Strategies

- Build staff members' knowledge and capacity by connecting them with relevant professional development and networking opportunities.
- Maintain established program partnerships, e.g., with the Milton-Freewater Unified School District, and apply lessons learned in considering expansion to other schools or districts.
- Work with mission-aligned entities like the WWCC Water & Environmental Center, the Walla Walla Conservation District, the CTUIR, and the Tri-State Steelheaders to explore the creation of a basin-wide watershed education curriculum, including a sustainable funding model.
- Identify opportunities for joint programming to create efficiencies and improve program scope and quality.
- Extend the reach of educational programs in the basin by supporting partners in implementing and promoting their programs and identifying specific ways that they can support ours.

PRIORITY 5: A diverse and stable funding portfolio

A resilient organization requires a diverse, stable funding base. WWBWC will work to increase unrestricted revenue while continuing to pursue strategic, mission-aligned grants and partnerships.

Priority 5 Strategies

- Increase the proportion of WWBWC revenue that is unrestricted by intensifying efforts to secure funding from individuals and the business community, highlighting project successes and partnerships to demonstrate impact and make the case for investment in our work.
- Pursue restricted funding from a broader base of institutional funders—private and corporate foundations, state and local agencies, municipalities, etc.
- Grow the Council's endowment at the Blue Mountain Community Foundation.
- Showcase project successes and landowners' perspectives across a variety of media to tell the story of our work and its tangible benefits.

- Explore incorporation of a fee-for-service revenue model, monetizing WWBWC services like water quality testing.
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Measuring Progress

WWBWC will track progress by setting annual SMART goals, providing regular updates to the Board of Directors, and engaging partners and stakeholders to ensure the plan remains responsive, relevant, and effective.