



STATE OF WASHINGTON

May 7, 2020

Honorable Pat McCarthy
Washington State Auditor
P.O. Box 40021
Olympia, WA 98504-0021

Dear Auditor McCarthy:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the State Auditor's Office performance audit report, "Assessing Success of the Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership Pilot." The Department of Ecology and Office of Financial Management worked together to provide this response.

We appreciate the information provided about the management of the watershed over the past 10 years by the volunteer partnership, as well as the recommendations by the State Auditor's Office for managing its future. The Walla Walla watershed is a coveted resource relied upon by many Washingtonians and other water users in the basin, including those in Oregon. As stewards of state resources, we must ensure the future health and sustainability of the watershed while being mindful of producing results with the public investment.

For the past two years, Ecology has actively collaborated in the 30-year strategic planning effort underway in the Walla Walla basin that will include integrated water resource strategies for improving streamflow, funding, monitoring and continuous improvement efforts in the watershed. We have renewed and broadened involvement from partners eager to find mutual solutions by resolving differences. This collaborative effort includes the Walla Walla Partnership, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Oregon Water Resources Department, local governments in both Washington and Oregon, irrigation interests, environmental representatives and local stakeholders.

Ecology's Office of Columbia River and Water Resources Program is well positioned to resume management of the watershed whether or not the Legislature accepts the State Auditor's recommendations. Ecology will continue to pursue and improve broad stakeholder involvement, including members of the partnership, to increase the health, accountability and long-term stability of the watershed. We agree that improving our collective efforts with the state of Oregon, formally and/or informally, will be mutually beneficial and we have already begun conversations about better managing the bi-state watershed. Over the next few months, Ecology and the Governor's Office will explore the SAO's recommendation to formalize an agreement with Oregon, and the best way to do so.

Please thank your staff for their work on this informative performance audit report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura Watson".

Laura Watson
Director
Department of Ecology

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Schumacher".

David Schumacher
Director
Office of Financial Management

cc: David Postman, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Kelly Wicker, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Drew Shirk, Executive Director of Legislative Affairs, Office of the Governor
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