

AGENDA ITEM FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MEETING () Discussion only
(X) Action

FROM (DEPT/ DIVISION): County Counsel

SUBJECT: Letter of Support

<p>Background:</p> <p>The Board has been requested to provide a letter of support for the request to the USACE for funding of the Walla Walla River GI Study</p>	<p>Requested Action:</p> <p>Approve letter and authorize Chair to sign</p>
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ATTACHMENTS : Proposed Letter

*****For Internal Use Only*****

Checkoffs:

- () Dept. Heard (copy)
- () Human Resources (copy)
- (X) Legal (copy)
- () (Other - List:)

To be notified of Meeting:

Needed at Meeting:

Scheduled for meeting on: June 18, 2025

Action taken:

Follow-up:

Board of Commissioners



216 S. E. 4th Street
Pendleton, OR 97801
541-278-6204

Daniel N. Dorran
541-278-6201

John M. Shafer
541-278-6203

Celinda A. Timmons
541-278-6202

June 18, 2025

Mr. Edward Belk, Director of Civil Works
Department of the Army
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Re: Letter of Support for a General Investigation (GI)
Study – Walla Walla River, Nursery Reach

Dear Mr. Belk:

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners would like to express its strong support for launching a General Investigation (GI) Study for the Nursery Reach of the Walla Walla River in Milton-Freewater, Oregon. This stretch of river includes key infrastructure like the Nursery Bridge Drop Structure, levees, irrigation diversions, and fishways—all part of the federally authorized Milton-Freewater Flood Control Project—and plays a vital role in both flood protection and fish recovery, especially for Endangered Species Act listed salmon species.

The reach has been heavily altered over the years, with road and rail crossings, irrigation demands, and legacy infrastructure, all impacting the river's health and function. In February 2020, record flooding caused levee breaches requiring 3,000 people to evacuate. A 2020 Section 216 study highlighted major changes in the system—from fish listings and altered flows to dam removal, irrigation upgrades, and downcutting from past gravel mining—that clearly point to the need for deeper analysis.

In response, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) requested a GI ecosystem restoration study for this five-mile segment of the river to support both habitat recovery and continued flood protection. Furthermore, in March 2025, an Oregon Solutions project was designated by Oregon Governor Tina Kotek. This project created a collaborative table establishing partnerships between the CTUIR, the Milton-Freewater Water Control District (MFWCD), and others to ensure the needs of a GI study will be prioritized and met.

All these efforts align with broader restoration work already happening in the area, including CTUIR's First Foods mission, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife efforts, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration habitat goals, and the Walla Walla Water 2050 initiative.

Mr. Edward Belk
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A GI study would bring the technical tools and resources needed to fully evaluate the situation and develop a solution that supports fish, people, and infrastructure alike.

We recognize the vital importance of a GI study for this area and community and we commit to supporting the GI study by our continued involvement in the planning for this project and assistance of staff for needed information.

We urge you to support funding for this GI study—it's a key opportunity to build on the momentum already in place and deliver long-term benefits and solutions to the community and ecosystem, all while aligning with local, tribal, state, and federal priorities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely yours,

Celinda A. Timmons
Chair, Board of Commissioners

CAT:bt