



Office of the
Washington
State Auditor
Pat McCarthy

Assessing Success of the Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership Pilot

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Overview of the performance audit



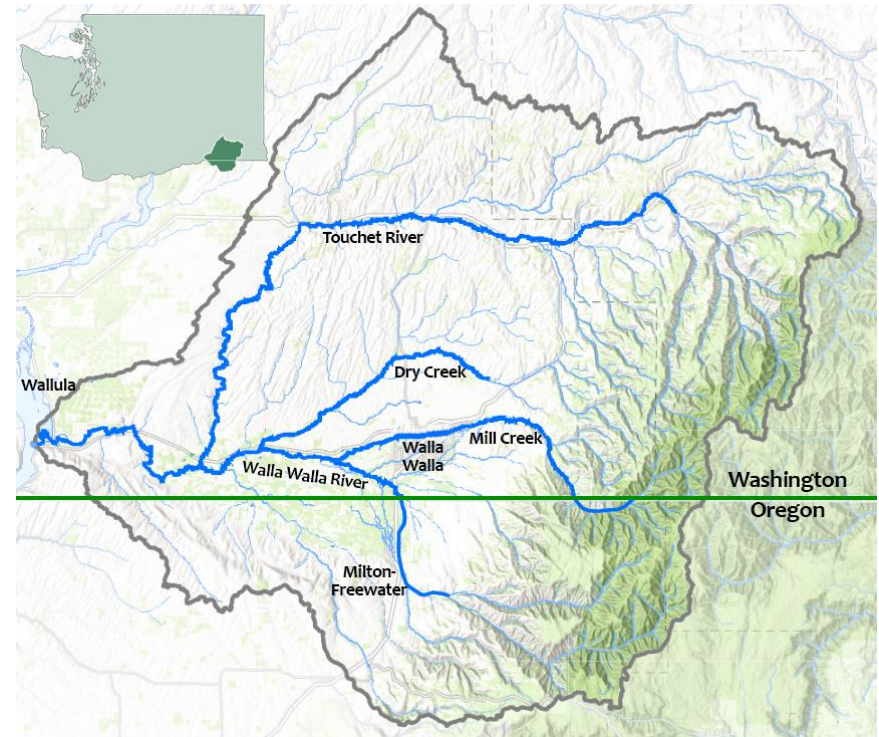
Audit examined the extent to which the collaborative Walla Walla Watershed Management Pilot succeeded in its efforts

- Given our results, we recommend:
 - ✓ The pilot be allowed to sunset
 - ✓ Management of the Walla Walla watershed be returned to the Department of Ecology
 - ✓ The state pursue a formal agreement with Oregon to manage water issues in the future

Unique characteristics of the Walla Walla watershed



- Water is critical to farms, fish and tourism but demand far exceeds the water available
- Watershed spans two states, with headwaters of the Walla Walla River in Oregon
- Parts of the river frequently dry up in summer



An experiment in collaborative, local water management

- Prompted by threatened federal action to preserve endangered fish
- Voluntary collaboration led to creation of pilot and Partnership Board
- Pilot allowed local water management without Ecology's typical regulatory oversight
- Board's unique authorities:
 - ✓ Approve local water plans
 - ✓ Allow water banking
 - ✓ Lease or purchase water rights
 - ✓ Acquire own funding



Photo by
WA State Auditor's Office

How we audited the pilot



- Compliance with the law
- Achievement of strategic goals and defined targets
- Potential for statistical tools to assess future streamflow improvements



The pilot did not produce improved streamflow

- Partnership's final report to the Legislature stated that streamflow did not improve
- Our statistical analysis also suggested streamflow did not improve

Partnership highlighted bringing diverse interests to the table as a major success of the pilot



The pilot lacked an adequate accountability framework



- Partnership met most statutory requirements for organizational and business activities
- However, it lacked key accountability elements, and did not:
 - ✗ Monitor streamflow or collect data
 - ✗ Develop outcome measures
 - ✗ Identify targets
- No approved local water plans contained performance measures, although they were required



Partnership lacked sufficient funds to implement key strategies



- Partnership board members cited lack of funds as fundamental barrier to success
- Little effort made to pursue additional funds
- Ecology provided 90 percent of \$5.5 million in funding, used primarily for operating expenses
- Without sufficient funding, Partnership could not pay for streamflow enhancement activities



Photo by WA State Auditor's Office

Other water management organizations provide good examples

- We looked at three models:
 - ✓ Yakima River Basin Enhancement Project
 - ✓ Oregon's Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council
 - ✓ California's integrated regional water management
- Examples of practices:
 - ✓ Aggressive fundraising
 - ✓ Performance measures
 - ✓ Measurable goals and objectives
 - ✓ Regular status reports
 - ✓ Stream gauge maintenance and use



Watershed study points to needed infrastructure projects

Bi-state Walla Walla Basin Integrated Flow Enhancement Study notes options for improving streamflow

- However, essential infrastructure projects are beyond the Partnership's capacity

Ecology could better support larger projects, offering needed expertise and leadership

- Current collaborative participation could continue in an advisory capacity — similar to the Yakima Project



Greater state-level cooperation is needed

- In 1936, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Oregon is not required to deliver any Walla Walla River water to Washington
- Washington and Oregon lack a formal agreement to collaborate in the watershed, but some collaboration occurs
- Formal bi-state agreement could address key water issues such as:
 - ✓ Conservation
 - ✓ Management
 - ✓ Apportionment



We recommend:

- The Partnership continue to work with Ecology to finalize a long-term plan
- The Legislature allow the 10-year pilot to sunset, returning oversight of the watershed to Ecology
- The Governor pursue an interstate compact with Oregon to address critical issues in the watershed



Questions



Information



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