

ANALYSIS

Item 57: Water Resources Department Walla Wall Groundwater Study

Analyst: April McDonald

Request: Increase Other Funds expenditure limitation by \$300,000 to execute an agreement with the Washington Department of Ecology, partnering on the Walla Walla Groundwater Study.

Analysis: The Walla Walla River basin is a complex watershed which supports communities, industries, farms, and endangered fish in both Washington and Oregon. Stream flows and aquifers have steadily declined over the past few decades, due in large part to climate change and overallocation. According to the Washington Department of Ecology (WDE), the basin has been overallocated for more than 100 years — meaning there are more legal rights to use water than there is water available. In 2020, the U.S. Geological Survey began a groundwater study of the Walla Walla River basin. The results of the study will help develop an updated, comprehensive understanding of the Walla Walla basin groundwater system. The intent is to ensure there is a solid technical foundation for future planning, policy, and management. Oregon’s Water Resources Department (WRD) is entering into a work partnership with WDE, which will allow the Department to hire a temporary Groundwater Field Technician to assist with collecting and analyzing the data needed to define and characterize the aquifers that span the Oregon and Washington border. The funding will also pay for expenses to support the aquifer pump tests. The agreement is performance-based, with funding contingent on successful completion of deliverables. The agreement is anticipated to last from December 2023 through June 2025, with the option of extension.

WRD seeks an increase of \$300,000 Other Funds expenditure limitation to support this partnership and will submit quarterly invoices to WDE for reimbursement of allowable expenditures. The anticipated body of work and the duration of the agreement will necessitate one full-time limited duration position (0.75 FTE). The Department’s intent is to partner with WDE in announcing the opportunity, leveraging strong ties to Walla Walla Community College, and hiring a student worker in the environmental or earth sciences program, if possible. No additional state funds are necessary to execute this agreement.

Recommendation: The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends that the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means recommend including an increase of \$300,000 in Other Funds expenditure limitation and authorizing the establishment of one full-time limited duration position (0.75 FTE) for the Water Resources Department in a budget reconciliation bill during the 2024 legislative session to execute the Walla Walla Groundwater Study agreement with the Washington Department of Ecology.

Oregon Water Resources Department
Crawford

Request: Increase Other Funds expenditure limitation by \$300,000 for groundwater study work in the Walla Walla basin in partnership with the Washington Department of Ecology.

Recommendation: Approve the request during the 2024 Legislative Session.

Discussion: The Walla Wall Basin (Basin) spans both Oregon and Washington. Reduced groundwater levels in the Basin affect water availability for a variety of interests and needs across state lines. The Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD) and the Washington Department of Ecology are working in partnership to study the area to better define groundwater characteristics in this hydrologic area.

Through an interagency agreement with the Washington Department of Ecology, to be completed by the end of the 2023-25 biennium, WRD will seek to perform the following work:

- Review of well logs
- Site visits
- Water level measurements
- Aquifer pump tests
- Data analysis between both agencies' hydrologists

The Department intends to hire a temporary student worker rather than a limited duration position to perform this work.

Legal Reference: Increase the Other Funds expenditure limitation established by chapter 460, section 3(4), Oregon Laws 2023, for the Oregon Water Resources Department, Technical services, by \$300,000 for the 2023-25 biennium.



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Water Resources Department

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December 4, 2023

Senator Elizabeth Steiner, Co-Chair
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court Street NE
H-178 State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs:

Nature of the Request

The Oregon Water Resources Department (Department) respectfully submits this letter requesting a limitation increase in the amount of \$300,000 Other Fund for the Walla Walla Groundwater Study work partnership with the Washington Department of Ecology. This partnership will allow the Department to fund a temporary Groundwater Field Technician to assist with collecting and analyzing the data needed to define and characterize the aquifers that span the Oregon and Washington border. This will be achieved through review and analysis of well logs, site visits, water level measurements, aquifer pump tests, and robust data analysis in collaboration with senior hydrogeologists from the Department and the Washington Department of Ecology. The funding will also, in part, pay for expenses to support the aquifer pump tests.

Agency Action

This is a performance-based agreement under which payment is based on the successful completion of expected deliverables. The period of performance of this work partnership is expected to commence on December 1, 2023, and be completed by June 25, 2025. The position will be funded by an Interagency Agreement with the Washington Department of Ecology for the duration of the 2023-2025 biennium with the option for extension should it be necessary. The Department will submit invoice vouchers quarterly to the Washington Department of Ecology for reimbursement.

Action Requested

The Department requests an increase in Other Fund limitation in the amount of \$300,000 to support this work partnership. One full time position will be needed to support this work for the duration of the agreement. The Department intends to hire a temporary student worker rather than a limited duration position, so we are assuming we will not need position authority. No additional state funds or position authority are requested.

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Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means
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Legislation Affected

Amend Oregon Laws 2023, Chapter 460 (House Bill 5043), Section 3, Subsection 4, "Technical Services," increasing the Other Fund limitation by \$300,000 for the 2023-2025 biennium.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. For additional information, please contact Lisa Snyder, Administrative Services Division Administrator, at (503) 983-5801.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. E. Woodcock". The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

Douglas E. Woodcock
Acting Director