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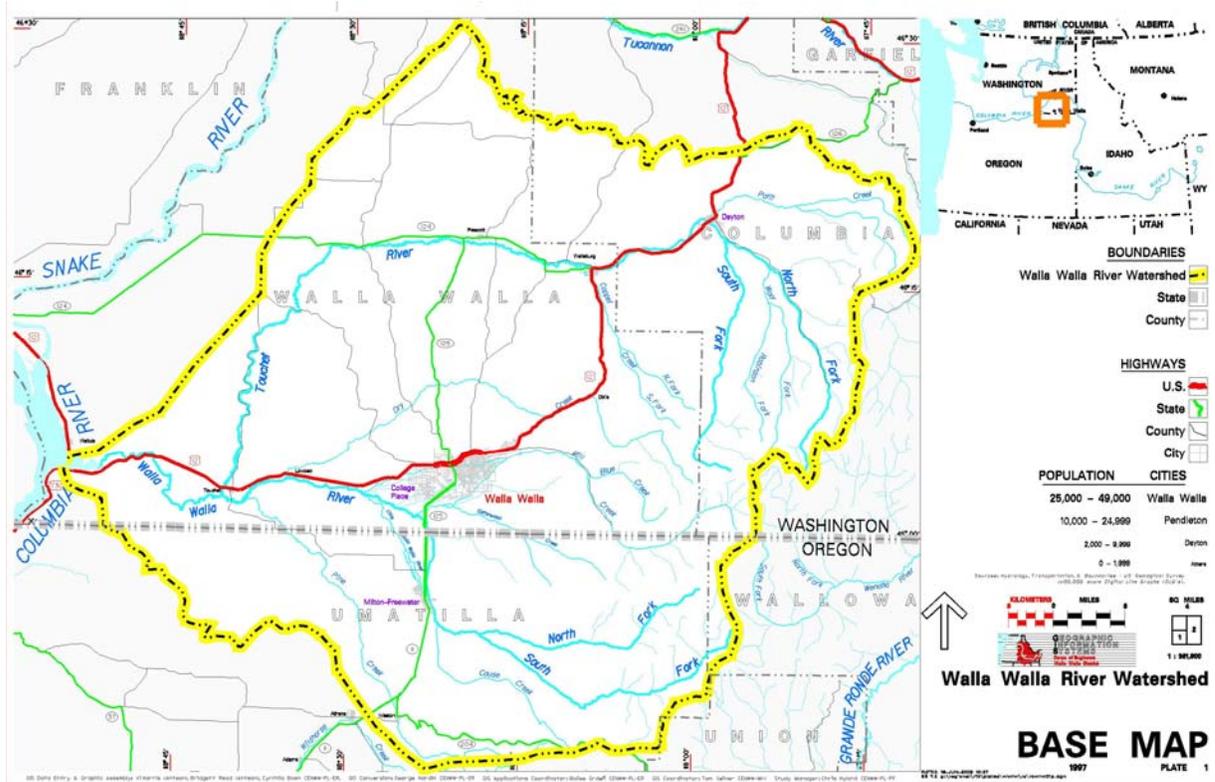
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Creating Partnerships and “New” Water in the Walla Walla Watershed

by
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The Walla Walla Basin is bifurcated by the state border of Oregon and Washington. This has led to water withdrawal and water distribution conditions which otherwise would not have occurred. For over 70 years the mainstem river went dry in the Oregon (upstream) portion of the basin due to irrigation withdrawals. This, combined with passage problems relating to the water diversion structures, caused the spring Chinook run to become extinct sometime in the 1930s. The complete dewatering of the river was codified by a US Supreme Court decision in 1933.

The salmon restoration solution is being modeled after the neighboring successful Umatilla fisheries restoration program where cooperative grassroots efforts lead by the

tribes and irrigators have restored salmon while keeping agriculture interests intact. In the late 1980's the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) began taking a lead role in developing and implementing a comprehensive Walla Walla Basin fisheries restoration program. This includes removal or laddering of irrigation diversion dams, screening of irrigation canals, stream habitat enhancement, instream flow enhancement, hatchery actions and monitoring & evaluation.

In 1999 bull trout were listed under the Endangered Species Act, and summer Steelhead in 2000. In an out-of-court settlement with the US Fish & Wildlife Service, local irrigation districts near Milton-Freewater, Oregon agreed not to divert the entire river flow into their irrigation ditch systems, thus providing an instream flow throughout the summer for the first time in over a half-century.

Notable with this agreement is how it developed in the opposite direction of what occurred in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Instead of acrimony, there has been a spirit of willingness among parties to work together to solve problems. This was largely due to leadership within the local irrigation community and CTUIR.

With this as the background, the CTUIR and the Walla Walla District Corps of Engineers (COE) have engaged in a study to look at the feasibility of improving instream flows in the Walla Walla Basin. While there are many factors affecting aquatic populations within this basin, it is generally recognized that flows are the limiting factor within this basin. This feasibility study will cost \$5.2 million dollars, cost shared 50/50 between CTUIR and COE. It is expected to be completed in 2005.

The purpose of the feasibility study is to find ways to increase the amount of instream flow, without causing harm to the local economy and society. This will be looked at in four measures: Water exchange with the Columbia River, building storage dams (which would capture high winter flows), irrigation efficiency projects, and buying water rights from willing sellers. All four measures have a negative side to them, ranging from large impacts on private landowners, other likely consequences of an action, secondary economic impacts to the local economy, and cost. There is also the potential to add shallow aquifer recharge as a mitigative measure for irrigation efficiency projects.

CTUIR has proposed instream flows for areas of the basin that not all of the local stakeholders agree with presently. This is currently under discussion. But one should note that CTUIR's & COE goal is not avoiding extinction (which is an ESA mandate), but instead provide flows which will improve the runs of fish to harvestable (CTUIR) and sustainable/restoration (COE) levels.

Still left to be resolved is the legal issue of creating instream flow in Oregon, and insuring that water is protected from withdrawal from the river when it flows into Washington.

This presentation (using PowerPoint) would cover the cooperative process that is being used in the basin, and highlight how parties have worked together rather than sparred through lawsuits and highlights the challenges facing the study.