



WASHINGTON WATER TRUST
Working to restore rivers and streams in Washington

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Collaboration in Walla Walla Basin Benefits Both Farms and Fish

Washington Water Trust Brokers Historic Deal, Creates Win-Win for Agriculture and Endangered Species on the Touchet River

WALLA WALLA, WA — Washington Water Trust (WWT), a nonprofit working to restore rivers and streams in Washington state, announced today a landmark collaboration with Prescott, WA area farmer, Melvin Talbott, that will restore flows to the Touchet River, marking the largest purchase of water for instream flow restoration ever in the Walla Walla Basin.

“This collaboration is a win-win for the landowner, the fish and the farms of the Touchet Valley,” said Amanda Cronin, WWT project manager. “It’s proof that partnerships like this, which are voluntary and market-based, really do work.”

As part of the agreement, the 385-acre Mr. Talbott will grow dry-land wheat instead of irrigated wheat allowing endangered fish to receive lifesaving stream flow during the spring and fall, which are prime spawning seasons. Mr. Talbott said of the agreement, “I was happy to help out the local stream, but it worked for me too because I could still raise dry-land wheat and keep my farm in production.”

Up to 3 cubic feet per second (which equates to about 1.9 million gallons per day) in the Touchet River will be protected permanently for fish, while agricultural land remains in

production. This agreement permanently protects 387.3 acre feet of water annually and, most years, will benefit approximately 31 miles of river habitat for fish and wildlife.

Gary James, CTUIR Fisheries Program Manager said, "The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) is sponsoring a major instream flow restoration project with the US Army COE and we are also one of the sponsors of this water purchase. The tribes strongly support this project because of the benefits it will directly provide to juvenile salmon and steelhead as they migrate out to the ocean and to adult salmon and steelhead as they return up the Walla Walla River. This effort, when viewed in combination with the many other water, fish passage and habitat enhancement projects represent a significant step towards restoration of water and fisheries resources in the Walla Walla Basin."

The Touchet River is crucial habitat for endangered bull trout and steelhead. In many years, low flows and high temperatures especially in the spring limit downstream migration of juvenile steelhead and upstream migration of adult steelhead who return to the headwaters of the Touchet to spawn.

Thanks to this agreement, improved stream flows during a critical period of the year and lower temperatures in turn will improve habitat for wild bull trout and wild steelhead, as well as reintroduced spring Chinook salmon. Increased stream flow in the Touchet River is particularly critical during drought years when mountain snowpack is below average, as we are experiencing in 2010.

The water purchase was funded by Washington State Department of Ecology and the Bonneville Power Administration through the Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program.

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