



CONFEDERATED TRIBES  
of the  
*Umatilla Indian Reservation*

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August 7, 2008

Mr. Barry Norris  
Oregon Department of Water Resources  
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Letter via Email.

SUBJECT: Comments on Task1.D – Estimate Water Needs, July 24, 2008.

Dear Barry:

The Water Commission of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (TWC) has reviewed the Draft Technical Memorandum (memo), dated July 24, 2008, by IRZ Consulting, LLC, which has been posted on IRZ's website for the Umatilla Recharge Project. The memo provides an overview of the water needs of the Umatilla Basin and summarizes the information presented by IRZ at a previous OWRD stakeholder's meeting, June 25, 2008. The TWC has the following comments on the memo:

1. The water needs of the Umatilla Basin are dire for both the irrigators who rely on groundwater in the Critical Groundwater Areas (CGA) and the fisheries that rely on cold, clean, healthy water in stream to support various life-history stages and passage flows for migration.

Senate Bill 1069 directs the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to conduct a "regional aquifer recovery assessment for the Umatilla Basin" and, as part of the assessment, identify "opportunities to improve streamflows in the Lower Umatilla River based on existing information." The memo identifies the current groundwater rights that have been curtailed in the CGAs but it also identifies new lands for irrigation (10,000 – 20,000 acres, 30,000 – 60,000 acre-feet). The focus of the assessment should be on

recovering groundwater in the CGAs for multiple uses and identifying opportunities to enhance water-quality and streamflow in the Lower Umatilla River. Identifying opportunities to develop new acres for irrigation is beyond the scope of SB 1069 and should not be further developed as part of the feasibility assessment.

2. Because the memo has identified new acres to be irrigated in the future, the target volume of 200,000 acre feet to meet current water needs of the basin is excessive. The target value is more likely 127,000 acre feet if only wells that were active and then regulated off are counted PLUS an additional amount of water for instream flow augmentation (discussed below).
3. The Executive Summary should include the water needs of the fishery in the Lower Umatilla River as identified in the section called Results and Findings. The Executive Summary should also reference the need to coordinate the Umatilla Recharge assessment with the ongoing federal Umatilla Basin Water Supply Study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.
4. In the Objectives section, the assessment is to include estimates of the water needs within the CGAs and “Return flow to augment Umatilla River flow to enhance aquatic habitat.” Opportunities to enhance aquatic habitat (increase discharge and lower stream temperatures) through artificial recharge and/or return flow from irrigation should be addressed and estimated along with the engineering of infrastructure for irrigation to meet the total water needs.
5. In the Results and Findings section, the reach of Umatilla River to be considered in the assessment is more likely either below the City of Echo or below River Mile 26.3 but not between these two geographic reference features. This needs to be revised in the text.
6. According to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (TMDL 2001), approximately 200 cfs of cold water releases from McKay Reservoir is needed in the summer months to lower the stream temperature of the Lower Umatilla River. Augmenting streamflows at 200 cfs for 60 days (period when Phases I and II are not active) requires approximately 24,000 acre feet of water. Opportunities to generate baseflows through groundwater

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recharge should be identified in the assessment to meet the 24,000 acre feet or 200 cfs of cooler water in the Lower Umatilla River.

7. Because streamflow enhancement is specifically identified in SB 1069, we disagree with the statement that “the overall goal of the Umatilla Basin feasibility study is not to generate an additional 200 cfs of flow through aquifer recharge mechanisms.” We do agree, however, that it may not be economically feasible to generate 200 cfs of streamflow through artificial recharge but any economically feasible opportunity to meet goals for instream flow should be identified and assessed in the Umatilla aquifer recovery feasibility study.
  
8. Per Section 6 of SB 1069, add a new section in the memo to reference the ongoing federal Umatilla Basin Water Supply Study being conducted by the Bureau of Reclamation, the opportunity to partner the Umatilla Recharge Project with the federal study and a potential federal water supply project, and the recognition that the federal study is looking at new development of Columbia River water for Umatilla Basin uses – specifically satisfying Confederated Umatilla Tribes’ water claims.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft technical memorandum from IRZ Consulting to address the water needs of the Umatilla Basin.

Sincerely,



Bill Burke  
Chairman, Tribal Water Commission  
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

Cc: Tribal Water Commission  
Aaron Skirvin, CTUIR Water Resources Program  
Kate Ely, CTUIR Water Resources Program  
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