To: [Insert name] Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla Office

[Insert name] Army Corps of Engineers, Washington D.C Office

Re: Support for Investment in Improvements to the Fish Ladder at Bennington Diversion Dam on Mill Creek, Walla Walla WA

Dear xx:

We are writing on behalf of the Walla Walla Water 2050 Strategic Plan Advisory Committee. The Committee is comprised of members representing diverse interests in the Walla Walla Basin, including state, local, federal and tribal governments and stakeholders representing agricultural, environmental and other interests. The Committee supports investments to improve the fish ladder at the Bennington Lake Diversion Dam on Mill Creek in the Walla Walla Basin.

Improving fish passage at the Bennington Lake Diversion Dam fish ladder emerged as a critical priority for achieving the desired future condition of healthy, functioning floodplains in the Walla Walla 2050 Strategic Plan which was released in June 2021. Fish passage specifically expands longitudinal channel connectivity in lower Mill Creek, facilitates fish migration, and allows ESA-listed Steelhead and Bull Trout and reintroduced Spring Chinook populations to access high quality upstream spawning and rearing habitat. Bennington Lake Diversion Dam currently represents the most significant fish passage barrier in the Mill Creek watershed as identified in the CTUIR 2017 Lower Mill Creek Final Habitat and Passage Assessment and Strategic Action Plan, and we urge you to dedicate sufficient funds to upgrade the fish ladder to support recovery of salmonids in the Walla Walla Basin.

Your investment in upgrading the Bennington Lake Diversion Dam fish ladder is complimented by numerous other habitat restoration efforts supported by a broad coalition of partners including, improvements to the low flow channel in the Mill Creek ACOE Flood Control project and floodplain restoration up and downstream of the Flood Control Project, instream flow dedications by the City of Walla Walla and numerous other habitat and water quality improvements. As implementation of the Walla Walla 2050 Strategic Plan advances we foresee additional opportunities and need for ACOE investments and support.

Your investment to address fish passage barriers and habitat enhancement in lower Mill Creek will be crucial to recovering salmon, bull trout and steelhead in the Walla Walla Basin which will be necessary in order to delist ESA-listed Mid-Columbia River steelhead and bull trout. Please let us know if there is anything else we can do to support your efforts to improve the Bennington Lake Diversion Dam fish ladder.

Sincerely,

G. Thomas Tebb, Director Office of the Columbia River

Eric Quaempts, Director, Department Natural Resources, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Tribes

Thomas Byler, Director Oregon Department of Water Resources