

Water partnership fosters collaboration and jobs

Faced with the challenges of restoring a watershed, recovering fish runs, and better managing limited water resources, organizations in the Walla Walla Valley came together to create the Walla Walla Community College Water & Environmental Center. The Center is a winner of a 2010 Governor's Workforce & Economic Development Best Practices Award.

Partners

Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
Walla Walla Watershed Alliance
Washington State Department of Ecology
The Sustainable Living Center
Walla Walla Community College

The Water and Environmental Center illustrates the vital role that collaboration and partnership plays in addressing issues essential to the



sustainability of eastern Washington's water-dependent agriculture, salmon runs and overall economy. By combining research and development that leads to innovative new ideas, while providing hands-on education that trains new workers, the Center has the potential to both generate environmental solutions and spur economic growth that results in family-wage jobs.

Opened in 2007, the Water and Environmental Center has served as a nexus for the region's interests, talent and resources dedicated to water management, education, and research. The Center fosters common ground through education and collaboration among a wide range of partners and interests, including the Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership, Walla Walla Watershed Alliance, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Washington State Department of Ecology, the Sustainable Living Center and Walla Walla Community College.

An expansion of the center will result in an aquatic research and propagation laboratory, specimen/biology laboratory, water quality laboratory, hydrology laboratory, classrooms and office space. When completed by summer 2011, the project will have created 27 jobs.

"The Water and Environmental Center is a valuable partner, uniquely equipped to bring stakeholders together in a collaborative environment to provide education in our innovative effort to pilot local water management."

Cathy Schaeffer
Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership

The center provides short-term and associate degree-level technical instruction. In particular, the center provides two-year associate degrees through the Irrigation Technology, Water Resources Technology and new Watershed Ecology programs. Students who earn associate degrees in water resources programs are able to transfer to a four-year college or university, or move directly into the workforce as technicians in water quality, conservation, irrigation or biology. These programs are closely tied to regional employers, including the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Nez Perce Tribe.

Furthermore, the center has made it possible for innovation in efficient water management and other environmental advances by co-locating: a tribe with success and commitment to salmon and habitat restoration; the Snake River Salmon Recovery Board, an advocacy group for national and state policies and practices; a watershed policy making group; a non-profit enterprise focused on sustainable practices as well as professional educators and experts in environmental management.

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The Walla Walla Valley, known for its world class wine and sweet onions, needs to use water efficiently and with environmental sensitivity, especially as vineyards and the production of other value-added crops expand. The Center's pioneering efforts to educate, collaborate and ensure wise water management practices will help sustain a bountiful future for the Walla Walla Valley.

Governor's 2010 Best Practices Award Winner