Minutes of May 27th, 2026 Board of Directors Meeting

The meeting was held at the Recovery Board office at 1200 Chesterly Drive in Yakima with remote participation via Zoom.

Board Members Present (in person): Adam Fyall (Benton County), Juliet Potrykus and Daniel Tiliano (City of Yakima), Richard Bloom (City of West Richland), Steve Becken (City of Prosser)

Board Members Present (online): Amanda McKinney and Troy Havens (Yakima County), Delano Palmer (City of Ellensburg), Brandon Rogers (Yakama Nation)

Staff present: Alex Conley, Cheyne Mayer, and Amber Knox

Guest speaker: Larry Matson, Office of Columbia River

Additional guests: Michelle Mercer, Grant County, and Amber Jackson, Washington State Department of Ecology

Lunch and Workshop Session

The work session was called to order at 12:20 p.m.

Larry Matson, Director of the Office of Columbia River (OCR), led a discussion of opportunities for the Recovery Board to engage with Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (YBIP). He noted that, approximately 18 months into his role, he has been reviewing historical planning documents, including the 2011 Columbia River Instream Flow Atlas and related 2016 updates. He reported that the atlas has been superseded by a long-term water supply and demand forecast expected to be issued shortly that describes water needs across irrigation, industry, agriculture, municipal use, recreation, and fish. He noted that OCR is working to address these needs through major initiatives in the Walla Walla and Icicle Basins, the Odessa Groundwater area, as well as through its support of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (YBIP). Director Matson described efforts in the Walla Walla Basin to revise the funding structure, develop a stakeholder project catalog, and align limited resources with existing priorities while reducing administrative burden on project sponsors.

Director Matson also reviewed the Washington Water Futures initiative led by the Washington State Department of Ecology under Director Casey Sixkiller. He reported that listening sessions and roundtables will be convened during the summer, with recommendations to the Legislature anticipated in November. Board members discussed the importance of supporting robust project development rather than focusing solely on projects that are already shovel-ready, as well as the need for greater clarity around agricultural and municipal water use needs in the Yakima Basin.

The group discussed Yakima River curtailments, including regulatory authority, the implications for junior and senior water rights, and planning for alternative municipal water supplies. The discussion also covered intersystem transfers, aquifer storage and recovery, conservation incentives, return flows, municipal growth, and the need for clearer public communication regarding basin inflows, outflows, and long-term water management strategies. Director Matson noted OCR is developing a visual diagram of Yakima Basin water inflows and outflows. Board members and staff also discussed how the Recovery Board can remain engaged through YBIP committees, coordination groups, and funding alignment processes.

At 12:40 p.m., Michelle Mercer of Grant County presented a local government sage steppe initiative and symposium idea.

Ms. Mercer described ongoing efforts to convene stakeholders around shrub-steppe mitigation, land use planning, and regional coordination in Eastern Washington. She referenced prior work in Benton City and emerging planning efforts in Ephrata, noting strong interest in using the best available science to guide future mitigation discussions. Board members discussed the potential value of a neutral convening structure, the relationship between shrub-steppe and broader habitat considerations, and whether the Recovery Board should participate in planning discussions. The presentation concluded with general support for continuing the conversation and identifying next steps, including possible support from regional partners and a sounding board group to shape timing, speakers, and structure. The discussion wrapped at 1:00 p.m.

Director Matson departed the meeting at 1:25 p.m.

At 1:30 p.m., the Board of Directors transitioned to review the work plan, bylaw revision, budget changes, and policy priorities. Staff noted that draft materials must be circulated by early June for review prior to the annual meeting.

Alex Conley reported that the organization remains generally on track, although capacity constraints have required some rescheduling. In reviewing the work plan, members thanked staff for setting up workshops, presenters and tours before meetings. Staff noted that the twice a year formal letter to Board members has helped increase member engagement and asked Board of Directors members how staff can support their efforts to report back to and engage their jurisdictions. Alex noted that the monthly Executive Director report to Directors has morphed into a broader-audience monthly newsletter; the group supported adjusting the work plan to reflect that change. The group also reaffirmed their desire to review/update the Board's strategic plan prior to the 2027 Annual meeting and noted the January meeting as a good time to initiate that discussion.

Staff noted fiscal systems changes are nearly complete, and that Amber has settled in well as Operations Manager. Alex noted that based on current budget forecasts, the Board is in a good position to hire a Recovery Coordinator by November. The Board discussed the position and why it may be challenging to fill and encouraged Alex to make that a high priority. The Board still needs to review whether additional communications support is needed and how to secure that.

The group reviewed the work plan tasks regarding funding diversification, noting that goals had technically been met with the grants secured for the Naches Forest Partnership. The Board of Directors emphasized that diversifying funding should be an ongoing goal; staff noted the specific value of securing even a modest amount of dedicated funding for legislative outreach work.

Alex noted that work to implement the recovery program for bull trout has progressed well; the Bull Trout Working Group is meeting every 2 months and is 80% done with the Bull Trout Action Plan update that should wrap up in the fall of 2026. The biggest gap in our workplan is the ongoing deferral of several of our Steelhead Recovery Program deliverables, which have been deferred until hiring is complete. The Board of Directors supported adjusting deliverable dates to reflect this, while emphasizing the need to complete hiring so that they do not need to be deferred again.

The Board reviewed the work plan tasks related to better defining Board roles in wildlife issues; the group agreed that this was still important to keep in mind, but agreed that it is a secondary priority at this time.

The group then discussed the proposed Communications Plan updates and agreed that it remains an important task to focus on in the fall/winter this year so that it can feed into strategic planning in the spring.

Staff noted that the work plan, as revised based on this discussion, will be circulated as a draft for review by June 6, but that changes can still be proposed as late as in-person at annual meeting in August.

Business Meeting

The business meeting was called to order at 2:04 p.m.

1) Welcome & Introductions: Board members and guests introduced themselves. Chair Adam Fyall confirmed a quorum and noted that he would need to leave at 3:00 p.m. and would rejoin by telephone to maintain quorum; he asked Vice Chair Bloom to take over facilitation of the meeting at that time.

2) Approval of Agenda and Prior Minutes: Delano Palmer moved approval of the agenda, seconded by Richard Bloom. The motion passed unanimously. Delano Palmer also moved to approve the April 1st meeting minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Richard Bloom and passed unanimously.

3) Updates:

    a. Fish & Water Updates: Alex updated the Board on fish runs and water conditions. Over the winter mountain precipitation was just above average, but warmer storm patterns resulted in more rain and less snow than typical. Snowpack was depleted earlier than usual but reservoir storage was maxed out all winter. Pulse flows were used to move fish downstream before expected lower summer flows. The basin is now operating under storage control, with agricultural proration at 52 percent. Concern was expressed about lower river temperatures and reduced flows affecting spring Chinook, summer Chinook, and sockeye later in the season.

    b. Recovery Program Updates: Alex noted that the Bull Trout Work Group continued to make progress towards completing the Bull Trout Action Plan Update and is developing its 2026 recommendations for YBIP Bull Trout funding. He reviewed staff participation in steelhead recovery discussions including lower river planning and project work group participation.

4) Public Comment: Staff and Board members recognized Alex Conley's 20-year anniversary as Executive Director of the Recovery Board.

5) Correspondence: Alex highlighted a support letter for the Yakama Nation/Yakima County application to the Ecology Floodplain by Design program that went out under his signature. No other correspondence was discussed.

6) Board Logistics:

    a. Financial Updates: Staff reported that cash flow remains stable, leave accrual liabilities are covered, and financial reporting transitions are progressing. Staff are working toward adding accounting support and implementing a quarterly close process. Negative revenue in current reports was attributed to the timing of reimbursement-based grant receipts, which typically occur after the end of the quarter.

b. Naches Forest Partnership Funding Agreements: Staff reported that agreements related to Naches Forest Partnership were still being finalized and were not available for approval at this meeting. The highest priority is completion of an amendment to the Board's contract with Cascadian Lifestyles for facilitation and coordination services, which expires on June 30th. Staff expect other agreements to be ready for review at the August 8 meeting. Steve Becken moved to delegate approval of the coordination contract amendment to the Executive Committee. Richard Bloom seconded the motion, and it passed without objection.

7) Annual Meeting Preparations:

a. The Board of Directors reviewed the planned location, agenda and speakers for the August 5th Annual Meeting and discussed how to get invitations out broadly.

b. The Board of Directors reviewed draft updates to the work plan for circulation to member jurisdictions. Richard Bloom moved to approve the draft work plan and budget, pending positive review of any final updates by email the following week. Troy Havens seconded the motion, and it passed without objection.

c. The Board of Directors reviewed draft updates to the budget for circulation to member jurisdictions. Staff reported that FY2026 spending remains below budget due to staffing vacancies and lower-than-anticipated contracted work. The draft FY2027 budget was updated to better reflect actual FY2026 conditions and anticipated personnel costs. Staff also noted uncertainty regarding state salmon recovery funding tied to federal processes but advised that the organization is positioned to fund a recovery position through June 30, 2027, even if those federal funds are delayed or not received. Richard Bloom moved to remove column M and assume receipt of $285K in PCSRF funding for purposes of publishing the draft budget for the annual meeting. Juliet Potrykus seconded the motion, and it passed without objection. Final budget approval will occur at the annual meeting.

d. The Board reviewed the proposed FY2027 meeting schedule and discussed moving the September meeting to September 23. Members also discussed the value of incorporating additional tours with selected meetings while being mindful of staff capacity and travel demands.

At 3:07 p.m., Adam Fyall transitioned to remote participation and Richard Bloom took over leading the meeting.

e. The Board of Directors reviewed proposed bylaw and policy changes; the only proposed bylaw change to be circulated to the Board is the adjustment of Technical Advisory Group membership numbers previously discussed, Proposed policy manual changes are all simple changes to bring manuals current with board-approved current practice. Other policy changes will be addressed in a more in-depth review in the fall. The Board of Directors supported forwarding the proposed changes to the full membership.

f. The group discussed possible membership, committee, and officer changes that will be evaluated at the Annual Meeting. Staff noted that no action is needed today but requested that members let us know about any role changes as early as possible.

g. The group reviewed the draft letter to members and supported sending it as presented.

h. Staff requested that members submit nominations for annual meeting awards via a web form. Members asked if there is a list of past awardees; Amber committed to providing one on the Board's web site.

8) Lead Entity Program Updates:

a. Cheyne shared pictures from SRFB sponsor presentations and site tours. Both events were well attended and successful.

b. RCO will be recommending a 2026 regular SRFB grant round spending package to the SRFB in May that includes $1.1M from the state for the Yakima Basin. This represents the minimum funding available for us this year, regardless of when Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF) funding arrives and at what amount. Any federal funds after the September SRFB funding decision will likely be used to fund alternates on ranked project lists. Maximum funding for this grant program is estimated at $2M total if full PCSRF funding is received.

c. A second cost increase has been submitted for the riparian grant round, bringing the total requests up to at least $150k. This is less than available funding. The Basin has $195k for the program this year, but the Klickitat LE has let us know they're unable to use their allocation, so we may have as much as $500k. Staff are exploring options for spending this funding, including swaps with another lead entity or region, or a mini grant round before final applications are due June 22nd.

d. The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is at 10 members following Zac Zacavish's resignation due to his change of jobs.

9) Outreach Updates:

a. Amber Knox presented an outreach program update focused on aligning the 2018 Communications Plan with the 2023 Strategic Plan.

b. The Board discussed a legislative outreach plan and a proposed letter to legislators outlining policy goals, with the intent of taking a more proactive role in legislative engagement.

c. Board discussion emphasized a concise set of policy priorities, including permitting, post-flood recovery issues, floodplain protection, restoring reduced outreach funding, and targeted science and monitoring funding requests. Members agreed to review the draft letter by email, with Executive Committee review and final approval to follow before distribution to legislators representing the Yakima Basin.

Cheyne Mayer offered brief remarks in recognition of Alex Conley's 20 years of service. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:59 p.m.