



Protecting Natural Flows in Oregon Rivers

**Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon
By Jim McCarthy**

*ODFW Commission
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Hello, my name Jim McCarthy and I am the Southern Oregon Program Director for WaterWatch of Oregon. Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers and aquifers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation, and other public uses of Oregon's waters. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants, and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch leads a coalition of multiple organizations whose members live, work, fish, and recreate in and along the North Umpqua River above and below Winchester Dam, including in coastal communities. Our coalition's members depend upon the salmon and steelhead runs from this river for our livelihoods, for world-class recreational opportunities, for the economic well being of our communities, and for cherished traditions. This coalition was formed to bring the rule of law to Winchester Dam, until such time as the dam can be removed for the benefit of the North Umpqua River and the people who love and depend upon it.

Thank you to this Commission and to ODFW staff for standing up for the North Umpqua and approving the final order for new fish passage at Winchester Dam.

This order promises transformative change and improvement at Winchester Dam after years of needless harm to the North Umpqua's water quality, aquatic life, and habitat.

As you may know, in 2019 the dam owners rejected our coalition's offer to contribute \$10,000 in engineering services to improve fish ladder function at Winchester Dam. The dam owners then mounted a meritless challenge to ODFW's 2024 proposed fish passage order. There already has been too much delay, and the needless harm to the North Umpqua must end. We urge ODFW and this commission to enforce the final order as it stands, without further delay.

This is a disintegrating 135-year-old dam maintained solely for private flatwater recreation for approximately 100 landowners. It is full of false attractions and sources of injury for fish. Unfortunately, we have learned the hard way that Winchester Dam

will continue to harm the North Umpqua and its invaluable runs of native fish until it is removed. Over the last five years, WaterWatch has offered twice in writing to the dam's owners to remove the dam for little to no cost to them. Our offer still stands.

We would like to remove Winchester Dam because we believe it would be beneficial for Oregon, for the local community, and for the environment. WaterWatch has significant experience working with state and federal government agencies, funding sources, engineers, and contractors on dam removal. For example, in just the past six years, in partnership with ODFW and others, WaterWatch has removed eleven privately owned dams in the Rogue River Basin, including ODFW priority fish passage barriers in the Rogue's Applegate River subbasin, Illinois River subbasin, and Evans Creek subbasin. WaterWatch is willing to use its best efforts to assist and work as a facilitator in bringing government agencies, funding sources, engineers, and other partners to the table to work on Winchester Dam removal, without requiring a direct financial contribution on the part of the dam owners. Our hand will remain out to work cooperatively with Winchester Water Control District, state and federal government, and private organizations to accomplish successful dam removal and site restoration at Winchester.