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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 18, 2026, — Representative Baumgartner Farm Bill Amendment Strengthens Future Funding Opportunities for Columbia Basin Project and OGWRP

[The Columbia Basin Development League \(CBDL\)](http://TheColumbiaBasinDevelopmentLeague.org) is applauding [Representative Michael Baumgartner](#) for securing language in the House-passed Farm Bill that recognizes the importance of the Columbia Basin Project and strengthens opportunities for future federal conservation and water infrastructure investments throughout the region.

Representative Baumgartner's amendment directs the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to include the Columbia Basin Project area within the Western Waters Region Critical Conservation Area (CCA), a designation that helps agricultural regions compete for targeted conservation, water management, and infrastructure funding through USDA programs.

"The Columbia Basin Project took a desert and made it bloom. While there is more work to be done to get the Farm Bill past the finish line, this amendment has the potential to make Eastern Washington more competitive for federal development dollars to complete the project. I am grateful for the partnership with the Columbia Basin Development League and look forward to getting the Farm Bill through the Senate and to the President's desk," said Congressman Michael Baumgartner.

The amendment was advanced through collaboration between Representative Baumgartner and House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson and reflects the critical role the Columbia Basin Project plays in supporting Washington agriculture, rural communities, and regional economic development.

"This designation represents an important step forward for the Columbia Basin Project and the communities it serves," said Jon Erickson, CBDL Board Chair. "By expanding access to federal conservation funding opportunities, this amendment helps position our region for continued investment in water reliability, agricultural productivity, and long-term sustainability."

The Western Waters Region Critical Conservation Area designation has already proven valuable for Eastern Washington water infrastructure projects.

"Representative Baumgartner's Farm Bill amendment represents a significant win for the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program (OGWRP)," said Kristina Ribellia, Executive Director of the Columbia Basin Conservation District. "USDA-NRCS investments totaling more than \$46 million in the three southernmost OGWRP delivery systems were made possible through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program's Western Waters Critical Conservation Area funding pool. Expanding the Critical Conservation Area boundary to include the entire OGWRP and the greater Columbia Basin Project greatly increases our ability to compete for and secure the additional federal investments needed to construct the remaining OGWRP delivery systems."

The Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program is a long-term effort to replace declining groundwater supplies with surface water delivered through Columbia Basin Project infrastructure. The program is critical to preserving agricultural production, protecting rural economies, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of water resources throughout the region.

CBDL leaders recently met with Representative Baumgartner's office to discuss the amendment and better understand its practical implications for irrigators, communities, and agricultural producers across the Columbia Basin. The League expressed appreciation for the congressman's willingness to engage directly with stakeholders and explain the benefits of the designation.

The Columbia Basin Development League extends its appreciation to Representative Baumgartner, Chairman Thompson, and all partners working to advance policies that support completion of the Columbia Basin Project and the continued success of agriculture in Eastern Washington.

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About the Columbia Basin Development League

Since 1964, the Columbia Basin Development League has supported the Bureau of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Project and its future development.

The League is working toward a fully developed Columbia Basin Project that supports a robust regional and state economy and quality of life through efficient, well-maintained, affordable infrastructure and sustainable environmental stewardship.

As the nonprofit organization representing the interests of Columbia Basin Project stakeholders, the League fills a critical advocacy role to advance policy that benefits the Project, including:

- Broad consensus on value of the Columbia Basin Project and plan for its continued, phased development;

- Legislative, congressional, and agency actions that continue Project development and protect its multi-purpose benefits.
- To this end, the League's Board of Trustees, representing all geographic areas within Project boundaries, works with an Executive Director to strategize effective means of delivering timely, informative, fact-based and solution-oriented messages to Project stakeholders and influencers in government, business, and communities. The League plays a significant role in facilitating discussion and action among stakeholders.