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Thank you for your letter regarding the conservation and management of Lake Abert. The challenges in the Lake Abert watershed are complex as there are not only the challenges associated with meeting the needs for water for ecological, community, and economic purposes – but there are also competing ecological needs for the water.

As you note in your letter, Lake Abert is a significant ecological system in Oregon, an internationally recognized migration staging habitat for shorebirds with 3.25 million shorebird use days annually. In addition, it is also part of the larger ecological system associated with the Chewaucan River, with the remaining portions of the Chewaucan Marshes and associated flood irrigated meadows providing spring migration and nesting habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds.

Conversations regarding Lake Abert water levels will require a holistic approach and understanding of the multiple uses and needs for water in the basin, taking into account the impacts of a warmer and drier climate. These conversations will need to consider and identify opportunities for improving resiliency in the face of climate change and associated drought cycles. In considering water management actions, we need to be thoughtful about the various tools and "levers" we can use and consequences across the landscape.

In discussing water management actions in the basin, it is also critical to engage tribal partners from federally recognized Tribes that have an interest in the basin to ensure we respect and protect cultural resources in and around Lake Abert.

Given the complexity of the species needs, impacts of drought cycles, and cultural resources present within this system, the state believes that it is important to build and convene a collaborative group to discuss relevant science and data gaps and to identify and develop support for any actions taken in the basin. Any effort will necessarily require the collaboration of multiple governmental entities (tribal, state, federal, and local), as well as the collaboration of individuals in the community and those that are interested in its ecological health. The state will reach out to the National Policy Consensus Center to seek their potential engagement around convening partners for a collaborative solution.

The National Policy Consensus Center is uniquely qualified to potentially help the state identify strategies to improve our understanding of the water resources of the system and to identify short and long-term options to be considered to provide the maximum amount and diversity of ecological values across the river and lake system.

We stand ready to work together toward a solution to the concerns you raised in your recent letter regarding this complex ecological system.

Sincerely,

Curtis E. Melcher, Director
Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife

Richard Whitman, Director
Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

Thomas M. Byler, Director
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