

# An Evaluation of Linked-in-Learning

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SPRING 2023



# **Evaluation of Linked-in-Learning Workforce Area 2021 Pilot**

## **I. Introduction**

Three Workforce Development Areas (WDAs) in Washington participated in a LinkedIn Learning (LIL) pilot during the first six months of 2021 (from January 4 – July 2). The purpose of the pilot was to evaluate how well LIL delivered additional training opportunities to job seekers and in some cases to business customers for ongoing professional development. LIL is an on-demand, skill-building platform designed to help match a learner’s skill gaps with customized courses to help them reach their professional goals. The three WDAs testing the product for viability as a workforce development tool were Benton-Franklin, South Central (Kittitas, Klickitat, Skamania, Yakima), and Southwest (Clark, Cowlitz, Wahkiakum). Following the pilot, LIL was made available to all Workforce Development Areas (WDAs) across the state.

The “2022 Counting Credentials Report,” commissioned annually by the national credential transparency policy think tank, Credential Engine, identified over 1 million unique credentials available to learners in the open credential marketplace. Since the first “Counting Credentials Report” in 2017, the number of credentials identified has more than doubled. More than 60% of identified credentials are from non-academic providers, and many of those are offered online.

As increasingly more jobseekers are drawn to online options, there is a critical need to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of these types of courses, particularly as it relates to career and earning outcomes. The LIL pilot in the three Washington state workforce areas gave us an opportunity to attempt this type of evaluation.

However, it is important to note that the pilots were not established with an evaluation in mind. Data was not collected or retained consistently across sites, and the usage rate was quite low. The following provides the results of this evaluation, with notes about where there was data and other limitations. We also offer recommendations for success for a future evaluation of this type.

## **II. Research Concept**

In mid-2021, the Governor’s office asked the state Workforce Board to conduct an evaluation of the use of LIL by WDAs. Given time and resource constraints, Workforce Board staff proposed using the state’s Employment Security Department’s Unemployment Insurance Wage file to track employment and earnings for participants that used LIL licenses through the three pilot WDCs. The fundamental research question was “*How did those that took LIL courses do compared to other users of WorkSource resources who did not take LIL courses?*”. Did users in fact have higher rates of employment and/or higher median wages than those who did not take LinkedIn Learning courses?

The reason for taking this approach is that the data is readily available in existing administrative data sets, meaning no further surveys or follow-up with individuals would be necessary. This was the only analysis option for researchers given the proposed resources and time frame. It also aligns with the overarching goal of helping WorkSource Center customers find meaningful employment, and mirrors much of the existing analysis done annually by state Workforce Board researchers.

## Limits and Issues with the Approach

There are limitations to using employment and earning outcomes to determine the value of taking LIL courses:

- Taking courses and learning new things may have their own inherent value, as people explore, learn, and grow. In a more practical sense, the value may play out for employers in the long term through increased employee retention or promotion. However, the time frame of this study does *not* allow for analysis of retention and career progression.
- The state Workforce Board was asked to produce the evaluation by March 2023, which limited research staff to using second quarter-after-exit data. Typically, the agency's research staff prefer a longer period to observe participants and evaluate the impact of workforce development resources on outcomes, usually four quarters after exit.
- For the most part, the numbers analyzed were very small (more on this later), which leads to less confidence in what the data is telling us.
- We were not able to use out-of-state data for LIL participants. However, the comparison group does include out-of-state data. Because of this, comparisons are not exactly apples to apples.
- Since the COVID pandemic started, standard assumptions about data sets and trends have changed. While this pilot cohort occurred as the economy was beginning to return to more normal patterns, we cannot assume that there is no COVID impact in the results.

## Region Specific Experiences and Issues

### *Benton-Franklin WDC*

Benton-Franklin (BF) WDC was interested in participating in the LinkedIn Pilot as it offered a new vehicle for hard and soft skills training for job seekers, with mobile and offline applications. It also had a professional development tool which could be offered to business customers seeking to enhance employee retention. One more advantage they saw was as a tool for engagement with potential WorkSource Customers who may not otherwise seek out services.

The BF WDC was asked if they would be able to engage 300 users in a six-month period. Staff had doubts about the ability to do so within that time frame but were willing to try. The region decided to focus on customers most negatively impacted by COVID (restaurant workers, managers, and youth receiving Unemployment Insurance benefits). Of the 2,946 customers initially targeted, 13 requested a license and only 4 activated the licenses. Given that lack of uptake they chose to widen the scope of those they offered licenses to.

Because of the low usage by individual customers, the BF WDC shifted their focus to business customers with the goal of upskilling existing workers. During the pilot, they offered the service to over 3,000 job seeker customers, over 58 business customers and their workers, and 70 WDC and WorkSource staff members. Here are the results of those efforts:

<b>1/4/2021 – 7/2/2021</b>	<b>Activated Licenses</b>	<b>Courses Viewed</b>	<b>Courses Completed</b>	<b>Videos Viewed</b>	<b>Videos Completed</b>
<b>Jobseekers and Business Customers</b>	43	228	54	1,394	1,211
<b>WDC &amp; WorkSource Staff</b>	67	334	112	2,535	2,223

After the pilot project, each customer segment (job seeker customer, business customer, and staff with an activated license) was invited by WDC staff to complete a survey so they could learn more about their experience. The employers that responded to the survey appreciated the variety of training topics available. Job seekers also commented positively on the variety of options and liked the ability to learn “on my schedule.” However, some customers found the amount of content to be overwhelming. They also expressed concern about whether they would be receiving credit from higher education institutions and took issue with the cost of software required for some classes (for example: QuickBooks and Solidworks). However, both groups rated their overall experience high (9 average).

Upon learning about the very low license uptake by individual customers, it was proposed to reach out and survey business customers directly to get their feedback. However, by the time Workforce Board research staff contacted BF WDC staff to retrieve data for analysis, they no longer had individual records for customers. This prevented the Workforce Board from conducting a third-party evaluation. This is not in any way meant to blame the staff and agency that carried out the program. This Workforce Board evaluation was not in place at the time the WDCs were setting up these programs, hence they were not aware of the need to retain contact information.

**South Central WDC**

The South Central (SC) WDC was interested in the LIL pilot to be able to provide participants access to a learning platform resource that is free and would give them the opportunity to gain valuable skills for the workforce. In operation the Case Management staff had the opportunity to assign and recommend LinkedIn Learning content to participants that were looking to refine or develop their professional skills, learn new software, and explore other areas relevant to their career goals. This opportunity allowed for self-paced learning for participants to gain valuable skills for the workforce. Their experience was that the participants that elected to use LinkedIn Learning developed and gained new skills that are valuable to help them succeed in the workforce.

One of the SCWDC Youth participants who gained computer skills and a new job using LIL was highlighted by U.S. Sen. Patty Murray on her Instagram page on 2/19/2022: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CaKzmwnFo8D/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>.

The biggest barrier to analyzing the South Central WDC’s LIL pilot is the very small number of customers who used licenses. Overall, there were just 31 individual records. In addition, no coursework information was made available as was the case for the SWWDC.

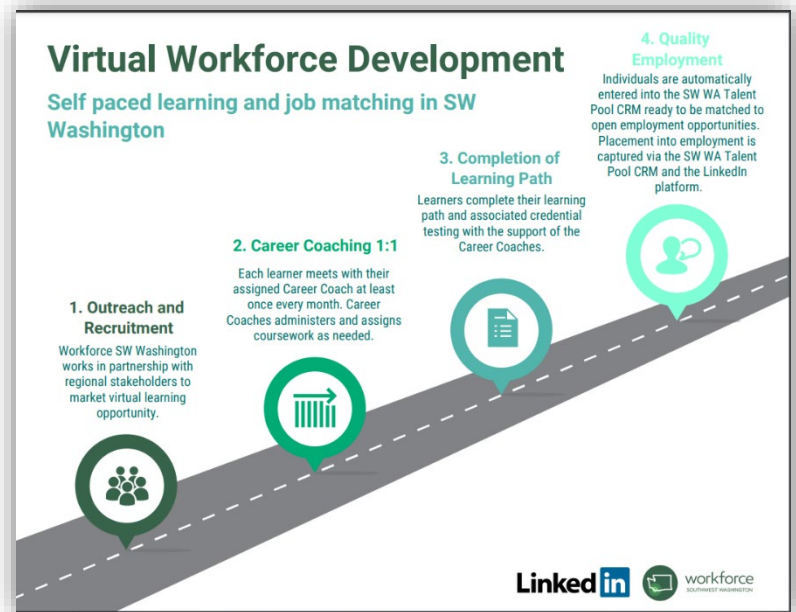
## Workforce Southwest

Workforce SW Washington (WSW) implemented LinkedIn Learning as an online job training and career learning tool during the pandemic in December 2020 to increase access to job training for specific occupations. WSW utilized Title 1 B and COVID-19 Employment Recovery Dislocated Worker investments to drive both WorkSource implementation and sharing, as well as customer usage and management via contractual agreements. Reporting was provided Quarterly to WSW via the Title 1 B subcontractor regarding customer licenses utilized, career pathway progression, and employment placement. Further, to codify and streamline data reporting, WSW partnered with Launchpad (local CRM) in the development of an API (Application Programming Interface) between LinkedIn Learning and Launchpad for learning path completion data, as well as skill development. Lastly, outreach for this new partnership was branded as CareersNW to stand up a standalone career and training initiative that was entirely virtual. To date, a total of 629 licenses have been activated in SW Washington.

Graphic 1 shows the high-level planned customer experience in the CareersNW – LinkedIn pilot.

WorkSource and WSW worked in partnership to outreach and share this new opportunity for online training and career support. An example of this outreach is shown in the second graphic on this page.

The cost per participant was on average \$100.00, including the costs of the 1 FTE Career Coach and the LinkedIn Learning agreement. With a massive need for employment and training support, as well as increased access to services, this pilot allowed for a higher quantity of individuals to receive basic workforce services in the comfort and safety of their own homes with no additional cost to the local workforce development board. To this end, this pilot saw success in both interest and usage in the region. On the other hand, as a border region between Washington and Oregon, the inability to access



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Contact your career coach today!  
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out-of-state wages was the biggest challenge for fully evaluating the WSW project. Federal regulations don't allow the U.S. Department of Labor's State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) to be used for this purpose, so wage matches of LIL users were limited to those from Washington state. However, the comparison data does include out-of-state wages. Generally, this isn't a big problem, but Workforce Southwest shares a labor shed with the Portland, Ore. metro area with a significant number of Washington workers holding jobs in Oregon. It is likely that including employment and earnings for Workforce Southwest customers who worked in the Portland area would lead to higher numbers.

### III. Results

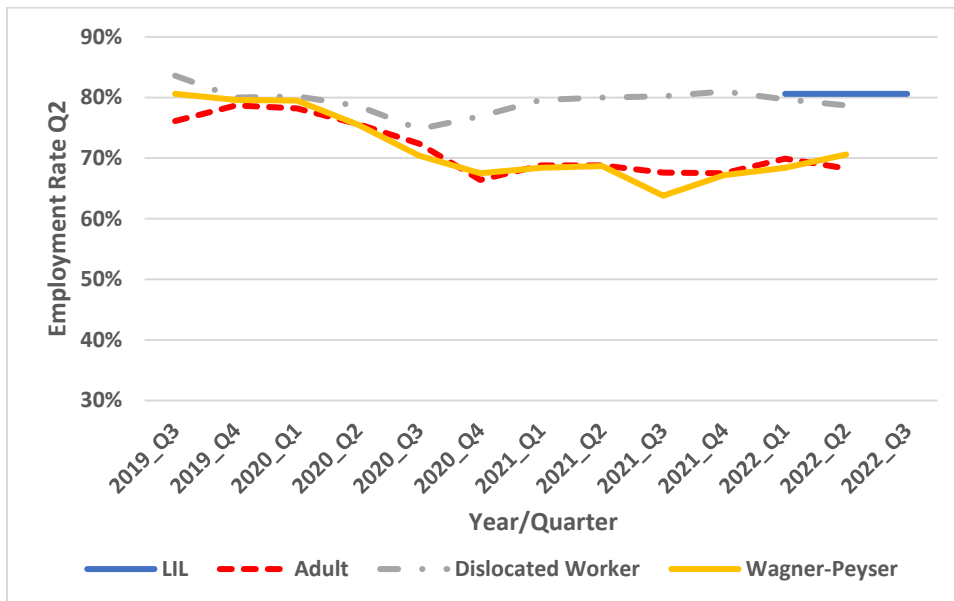
#### Data Used

Data used for comparison of the LIL user outcomes were derived from quarterly reports from the state Employment Security Department's WIOA participant data tables (the Participant Individual Record Layout, PIRL, tables). The latest report is available here: <https://www.esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/WIOA-QPR>.

The local Workforce Development Councils provided participant data. Workforce Board research staff relied on Social Security numbers and employment records from Employment Security Department to match employment and earnings for all LIL users two quarters after exiting the program. LIL Coursework data was provided by Workforce Southwest staff.

#### Employment Rates

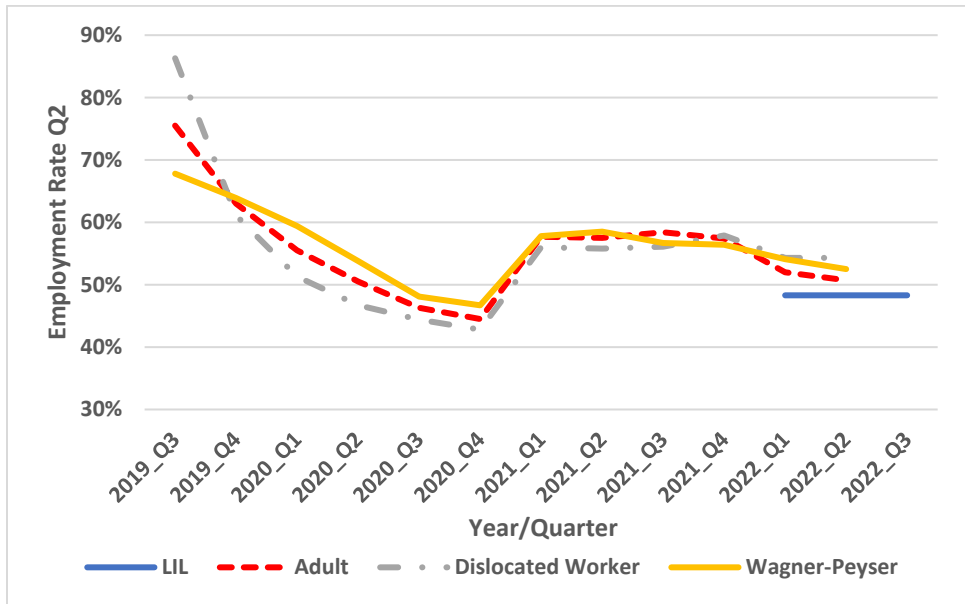
##### Employment rates for South Central WDC, Second Quarter after Exit



For the South Central WDC, LIL users were more successful at finding employment within six months after the pilot compared to participants in WIOA Title I-Adult and the Wagner-Peyser (WIOA Title III). Participants in the Title I Dislocated Worker (DW) program did nearly as well: an employment rate just

below 80% in the most recent two quarters, compared to just over 80% for LIL users. The other two comparisons, Adult and Wagner-Peyser were around the 70% level for the most recent quarters.

**Employment rates for Southwest WDC, Second Quarter after Exit**

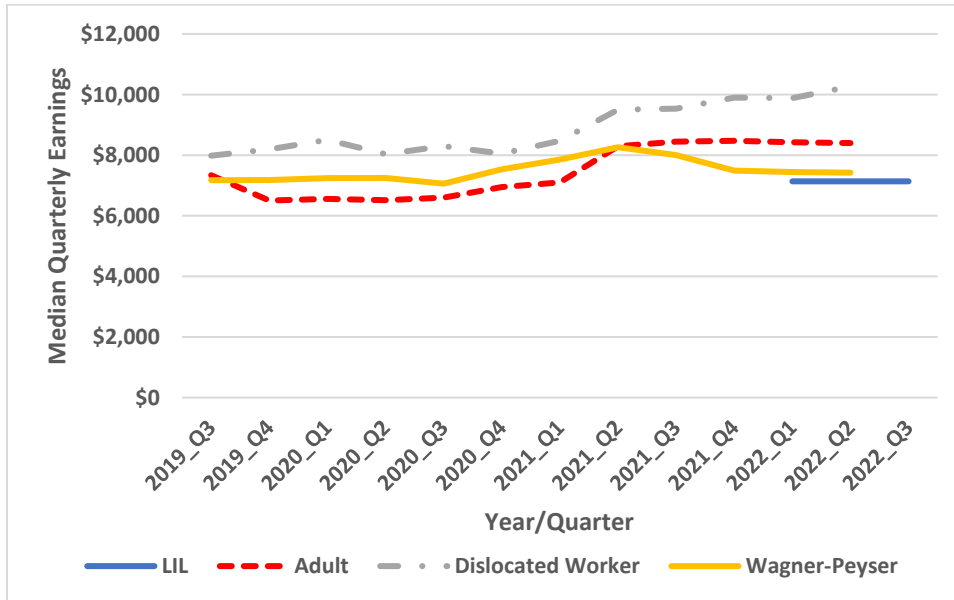


For the Southwest WDC, the LIL user employment rate was actually below that of all of the comparison cohorts. The LIL User employment rate in most recent quarters was just under 50%, at 48.3%. While the three comparison cohorts (Adult, DW, and WP) had higher employment rates, it was not by much. Their employment rates in most recent quarters ranged from 50.7% to 54.3%.

To sum up the LIL pilot experience with employment rates: The South Central WDC showed a small amount of increased employment compared to overall experiences there. However, it only includes 31 users, so it should be taken with a grain of salt. While Southwest WDC saw lower employment rates among LIL users than comparison groups, it was not by a very big margin, and it also excludes Portland area employment.

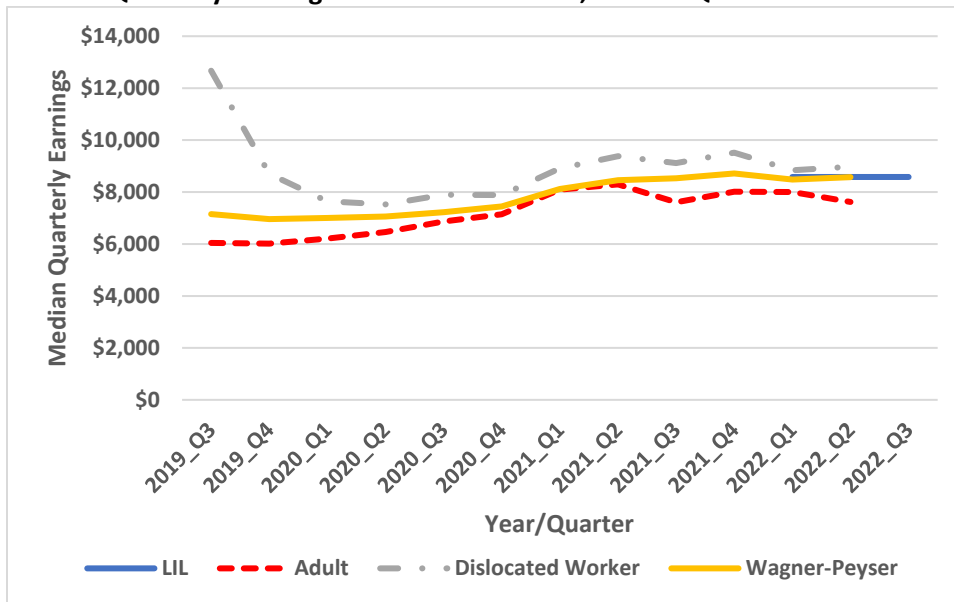
**Median Quarterly Earnings**

### Median Quarterly Earnings for South Central WDC, Second Quarter after Exit



For median quarterly earnings (2 quarters after the pilot ended), the script is somewhat flipped. In the South Central WDC, LIL Users had lower median earnings than the comparison groups. DW participants in the second quarter of 2022 earned 43% more than did the group that had LIL licenses. Wagner-Peyser was about at the same level as LIL, while Adult program participants earnings were between the two poles.

### Median Quarterly Earnings for Southwest WDC, Second Quarter after Exit





LIL Users fared better in terms of earnings in the SW WDC. Pilot LIL users had earnings right about in-line with (slightly higher) Wagner-Peyser program participants. LIL user Earnings were higher than WIOA Adult program participants, but a little lower than DW participants.

Overall, earnings for LIL pilot program users don't seem significantly different than for the comparison groups in the Southwest WDC. DW participants did earn quite a bit more than pilot LIL users. However, as stated previously, the lack of out-of-state employment records limits how far one can draw conclusions.

In sum, earnings for the small number of South Central WDC LIL users were below comparison groups while earnings were about average for Southwest WDC LIL users.

### **By Program**

#### **Employment Rate and Median Quarterly Earnings for SW WDC by Program Enrollment**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Employment Rate</b>	<b>Median Quarterly Earnings</b>
Adult	46.8%	\$ 8,550
Dislocated Worker	47.0%	\$ 9,045
Wagner-Peyser Only	54.8%	\$ 6,784

For the Southwest WDC, given the higher count of participants, we can look at outcomes by program. All Title I Adult and DW enrollees were also co-enrolled in Wagner-Peyser (WP). However, not all WP enrollees were also co-enrolled in Title I programs. This allows us to look at separate outcomes based on program enrollment.

The table above shows that compared to adult and DW, those that were only WP had higher employment rates, but somewhat lower median earnings. For comparison's sake, all WP enrollees (not just LIL) in the SW WDC had equivalent employment rate of 51.9% and median earnings of \$9,780.

Note that the small number of data points meant that the SCWDC as well as Youth program participants for the SWWDC could not be included in this "by program" analysis.

### **Coursework**

As mentioned, the Southwest WDC made coursework detail available to Workforce Board research staff. There is extensive information in the files provided: there were over 11,000 individual courses taken, with information on name, content type, percent completed, assessments completed, and skills.

However, the courses taken are not able to be connected to the employment outcomes. In addition, there are no aggregation variables that would allow staff to analyze by groups of similar courses. And finally, because of the lack of a comparison (such as another region to compare against), we are left with no way to evaluate courses taken.

## IV. Conclusions

Evaluations of workforce training programs are critical in allowing us to better understand how to best use training resources and a pilot program is ideal for such an effort.

Overall, the findings were less than clear. Only one of the WDAs had enough records to reach levels of significance and even that data had issues with out-of-state records. Considering all of limits as well as what the data is showing us, probably the fairest conclusion is that at best there is no conclusive evidence that LIL usage has enhanced employment outcomes for the pilot areas.

### Recommendations

Despite the less than clear findings, an evaluation was a very good idea. The Workforce Board Research Team has recommendations for how this evaluation could be improved:

- Plan the evaluation at the outset in coordination with program staff and coordinate throughout.
- Ensure the ability to track LIL users to employment outcomes.
- Ensure ability to track from coursework taken to employment outcomes.
- Where the number of users is small, staff could combine areas to reach appropriate levels of significance.
- Use comparison groups for better understanding of causality. This would involve much higher costs and an extended time horizon.
- Short of that, the study would need to have much higher numbers, with the study's parameters built into place well in advance.

### Research Options

There are a number of research options that should be considered in future evaluations like this, with various levels of utility and resource cost associated with them:

- Net Impact: is an approach that allows comparisons of treatment groups versus non-treatment groups. It can be used to make much stronger conclusions in general and specifically point to causality. This is probably the best approach to evaluate the effectiveness of program participation, but predictably is often to most expensive to carry-out. It also requires a much longer time horizon to look at pre and post treatment on populations.
- Participant Satisfaction Survey: This would entail sampling a survey of the treated population to determine participant satisfaction levels. This type of evaluation allows researchers to ask questions that aren't typically answerable from administrative data sets, However, it is best if done periodically to allow for a baseline and trends thereafter. In addition is can be very costly as large numbers of individuals or businesses need to be contacted directly.
- Deeper Descriptive Analysis: An example of this is the Workforce Boards Workforce Training Results (<https://wtb.wa.gov/research-resources/workforce-training-results/>). This analysis is conducted every year to show trends and includes 12 different workforce programs and all of those that participated in them.

It should be noted that the WDA representatives that research staff worked with were helpful and provided information available to them.

For questions and more information, please contact Workforce Board Research Director Dave Wallace at [Dave.Wallace@wtb.wa.gov](mailto:Dave.Wallace@wtb.wa.gov).