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Meeting Notes

Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Workgroup

September 11, 2024
In-person and Teams Virtual Meeting

Welcome, Introductions, and Agenda Overview

Anna Marandi with HDR Engineering, Inc. (HDR) welcomed the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project (YRBWEP) Workgroup members and other attendees participating virtually and in person. The following notes summarize the YRBWEP Workgroup presentations and public comments. For more information, please see the full presentations on the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (YBIP) website: [Yakima Basin Integrated Plan](#).

Executive and Implementation Committee Updates

Chad Stuart, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation): Chad noted that the Total Water Supply Available (TWSA) drought forecasts have changed from 51 to 52 percent, which will benefit the proratable districts within the basin. Reclamation is monitoring this through the rest of the season. Urban Eberhart (Kittitas Reclamation District [KRD]) commented that the additional one percent provided six additional days of operations for the district.

Wendy Christensen, Reclamation: Wendy shared that Reclamation and YBIP received \$35 million of appropriated federal funding and another \$6.2 million towards the Cle Elum Fish Passage project, Wapato Irrigation Project, and KRD conservation efforts. An additional \$16 million was awarded via the Inflation Reduction Act that will benefit the Toppenish Fan Aquifer project, the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology)'s drought planning efforts, KRD's North Branch Water Conservation project, and Roza Irrigation District. This funding announcement was given by Secretary Deb Haaland (U.S. Department of the Interior) at the Cle Elum Fish Passage celebration event in July. YBIP partners also received about \$38 million via Reclamation's WaterSMART program.

Tom Tebb, Ecology: Tom reported that Ecology is developing the state budget request for YBIP, which will see a 10 percent increase from the last biennium (2023-2025). Ecology is requesting \$59 million, with most of the funds dedicated to the feasibility analysis for Springwood Ranch and improvements to the lower Yakima River. Tom is working with Reclamation and other YBIP partners to create a water lease program for individuals who wish to fallow their lands for a year as part of the drought plan (mentioned above) for Water Year 2025.

Cle Elum Fish Passage Celebration Recap

Wendy Christensen, Reclamation: Wendy provided a recap of the Cle Elum Fish Passage event on July 24, which celebrated the completion of the juvenile fish passage facility. Attendees included

Secretary Deb Haaland, Tribal Chairman Gerald Lewis (Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation [Yakama Nation]), and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee. The celebration video, which included highlights from the event, was shown at the meeting [Cle Elum Fish Passage and Reintroduction Project Celebration \(youtube.com\)](#). Wendy thanked Reclamation, Ecology, and Yakama Nation staff for organizing the event and celebration video. She also noted that work continues on the Adult Collection Facility.

Joe Blodgett, Yakama Nation: Joe acknowledged everyone's efforts in putting the event together, including those behind the scenes working to secure funding for the project. He shared optimism that this project will help reintroduce sockeye salmon back into the river.

Phil Rigdon, Yakama Nation: Phil was honored to have Secretary Haaland at the event. He reflected on the moment and acknowledged the history behind this project and the significance of completing the juvenile fish passage facility for the community.

Comments Regarding the Cle Elum Fish Passage Celebration:

Tribal Councilmember Jeremy Takala: Jeremy Takala, tribal councilman with the Yakama Nation, was recognized at the meeting. He commended the YRBWEP Workgroup for continuing to move things forward within the basin, even in difficult times.

Raquel Crowley, Office of U.S. Senator Patty Murray: Raquel recognized the Workgroup and congratulated everyone for their contributions to YBIP. She noted that YBIP's collaborative efforts have become a national model for other agencies to replicate.

Lower River Part 2 Presentation and Panel

Tom Elliott, Yakama Nation Fisheries: Tom led a presentation on the lower Yakima River and the Yakama Nation's efforts to improve juvenile fish survival. The presentation included:

- An overview of the lower Yakama River.
- Its cultural importance to the tribe.
- The vision and goals for the future river.

Tom also updated the Workgroup on the tribe's current projects. Yakama Nation is engaged in ongoing management and monitoring as these projects are implemented and constructed. The work along the lower river will require additional staffing to address these issues.

- Benton Conservation District (BCD) is leading efforts to mow and remove water stargrass within the lower river.
- The Bateman Island project is currently in the feasibility study phase and will move into design and implementation in 2025.
- The Prosser Dam project is still in the pre-design phase, and alternatives are being evaluated.
- The Wapato Dam project is developing a feasibility report that will be completed in early 2025.

After the presentation was completed, Marcella Appel (Benton Conservation District), Curt Strifert (Columbia Irrigation District), and Merritt Mitchell (Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group) took questions during a panel discussion at the Workgroup meeting. The following questions, comments, and responses were collected during this discussion:

Wendy Christensen, Reclamation: Wendy asked the panel if they had any strategies to address water stargrass issues. *Hand harvesting has been shown to be effective in removing the plants, but it will take additional resources to make a significant impact. Additional pilot studies using bubble curtains may be explored to contain stargrass areas.*

Mike Livingston, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW): Mike asked the panel about their approach to redesigning and modifying Wanawish Dam to improve water flow and fish passage. *Curt stated that the stargrass is the main issue, and any improvements should benefit fish passage and water intake.*

Alex Conley, Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board (YBFWRB): Alex was happy to see progress and was curious about the water quality response to stargrass removals at the root. He asked if these areas are still seeing benefits and whether water quality improved there or if the stargrass is growing right back. *Marcella responded that it's complicated, but in areas harvested last year, growth is less. However, this was a bad year, so there is regrowth everywhere. Perhaps they could see more improvements in a year with heavy removal, better flows, and chemical treatment.*

Adam Fyall, Benton County: Adam commented that the stargrass issues require a more significant effort and pointed to mitigation work at Nelson Dam as an example to replicate in other affected areas along the basin. He expressed excitement for this project and the Workgroup's efforts in focusing on and solving issues within the lower river. *Marcella appreciated Adam's comments and showed optimism for this project and the future. Curt showed a photo illustrating the on-site conditions and piles of stargrass being removed.*

Andrew Matala, Yakama Nation Fisheries: Andrew mentioned that the juvenile salmon issues within the basin are significant. The summer returns aren't producing enough adult fish and Yakama Nation Fisheries is focused on creating self-sustaining populations within the basin.

Marcella Appel, BCD: Marcella noted that their stargrass permitting work ends this week, but they can record a video of their work this past season and share it with the Workgroup and other partners. Adam mentioned producing additional materials to explain why the project is time constrained. Marcella shared that some constraints are due to permitting within the July to September timeframe, higher water flows within the basin, and heavy machinery limitations. Benton Conservation District commissioned a video to discuss the various issues related to water stargrass and its effects on fisheries, water quality, and private irrigators.

Scott Revell, Roza Irrigation District: Scott asked Marcella which agencies were providing the permits for this project. WDFW holds the permits for this work, and the health district oversees some disposal permits.

Melissa Downes, Ecology: Melissa noted some dead fish were observed in the river this past summer and asked the panel how that impacted their work. *Merritt commented that they were concerned about*

the low returns but highlighted the importance of looking at these issues within the lower river as a system and working as a team to address them.

Tribal Councilmember Jeremy Takala, Yakama Nation: Councilmember Takala thanked the staff and partnering agencies for their work on the lower river.

Marcella Appel, BCD: Marcella shared that BCD is forming a water stargrass coalition, with the first meeting beginning in October. Interested parties can contact her for additional details.

Pom Pom Road Habitat Restoration Project and Slide Ranch Fire Impacts

Shawna Warehime, Yakama Nation Fisheries: Shawna provided an update on the Pom Pom Road project, which aims to restore aquatic habitat and fish passage at Toppenish Creek. Restoration is necessary to meet the Yakama Nation's treaty fishing rights and increase recreational fishing opportunities in downstream rivers.

The project recently completed the final restoration designs and is 95 percent complete with the bridge and road designs. Additional permitting and compliance work is underway. The recent Slide Ranch Fire burned approximately 3,118 acres of land. As a result, a BAER (Burned Area Emergency Response) team will assess and provide emergency stabilization and burned area rehabilitation. Another team will reassess the burned area and evaluate any impacts to the project's bridge design. Project designs are anticipated to be finalized by December 2024 or January 2025, with the bid process to follow.

Public Comment

Chris Maykut, Friends of Bumping Lake: Chris requested that the Sep. 9, 2024 "2017-2024 Continued Problems and Concerns" report submitted to the Department of Ecology's Office of Columbia River be included in the meeting notes and materials for the Sep. 11, 2024 YRBWEP Workgroup meeting.

David Ortman: David shared that it would be helpful if the YRBWEP Workgroup provided more clarity and consistency concerning Workgroup membership. David noted that he provided written comments on the 23 members of the Workgroup and the various YRBWEP subcommittees and subgroups. The Ecology website does not list the alternate membership or how the alternates are designated for the meetings. He observed that the current website has not updated the Workgroup membership list. He requested information about Peter Dykstra's affiliation with the Workgroup, including all meeting summaries with his affiliation and his contracts related to the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan.

David also commented that the YRBWEP Workgroup website does not list a Groundwater Subcommittee chair. He pointed out that Jason McShane (Kennewick Irrigation District [KID]) is listed as the Lower River Subgroup chair in the June 5, 2024 Workgroup meeting summary.

He concluded that the Washington State Legislature has given the Department of Ecology and Office of Columbia River hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars and shared his disappointment that environmental organizations within the Workgroup take so little interest in helping correct information on Ecology's website.

Wapato Irrigation Project Updates

Graysen Squeochs, Yakama Nation: Graysen updated the Workgroup on the Wapato Irrigation Project's (WIP) 2024 drought planning and response efforts. The existing infrastructure that WIP operates from does not accommodate mid-season water shutdowns or restarts, so significant system upgrades are required, as noted in a modernization plan developed within the last ten years.

Recommendations from a draft 2016 drought plan highlighted the need for flow rate monitoring and "fast-track" laterals and primary laterals to move water throughout the system and better distribute available water on a rotational schedule to various irrigation districts. Other activities include:

- Irrigation system operator training.
- Developing a WIP drought relief well testing and repair plan.
- Assessing and determining drought relief well conditions.
- Identifying priority repairs to ensure functionality throughout the season.

Graysen noted that the 2024 drought response required repairs at several drain pumpback stations, including:

- Harris Pump station.
- Lateral 4 Extension (New Temporary).
- Annahat Road and Blue Heron Road Pump Station.
- Annahat Road Pump Station (East Toppenish Drain Pumps).
- Becker Road and Yost Road Pump Station.

Questions/Comments Regarding the Wapato Irrigation Project:

Tom Tebb, Ecology: Tom asked Graysen if the project has a five- or ten-year horizon that they are working towards. Graysen noted that the timing of work depends upon funding and staffing availability. The modernization plan included estimates of up to \$100 million, which could increase due to inflation.

Roundtable Discussion

Jeff Tayer, WDFW (Habitat Subcommittee Chair): Jeff reflected on Phil Rigdon's comments about the history within the Yakima Basin and noted that disagreements and lack of funding made it hard to get work off the ground in the past. He shared that YBIP was a game-changer for the Cle Elum Fish Passage project and will be helpful for the work in the lower river.

Jason McShane, KID (Lower River Subgroup Chair): He thanked the presenters at the meeting and expressed appreciation of the acknowledgement that the upper and lower Yakima Basin complement each other and that the group is headed in the right direction to address issues in the lower river. Jason also thanked the various partner agencies and organizations outside the Workgroup for their work in the lower river.

Commissioner Cory Wright, Kittitas County: Cory appreciated everyone's work and contributions to the basin. He noted that some constituents consider YBIP a lot of effort for one portion of the basin, but this work will benefit the entire river.

Craig Haskell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Craig noted that there are still many issues within the river for fisheries.

Brandon Parsons, American Rivers: Brandon supported the work in the lower river and was glad to hear about progress on the Bateman Island project.

David Haws, Yakima County (Alternate to Amanda McKinney): David appreciated the conversation regarding the lower river and thanked everyone for participating.

Jim Milton, Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District (Alternate to Travis Okelberry): He enjoyed the presentation and discussion about water stargrass, noting that the Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District has yet to address it, given that it is currently not impacting their operations. He expressed interest in being part of the water stargrass coalition.

Sean Gross, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (Alternate to Justin Yeager): Sean appreciated the discussion with the lower river panel and the general focus on the lower basin. He shared that the issues in the lower river are symptoms of an ecological collapse of the Yakima River, and focusing on them will be required to improve the basin.

Phil Rigdon, Yakama Nation: He thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and was grateful for the Workgroup's focus on the lower river issues.

Chris Duke, Reclamation: Chris commented on the Cle Elum Dam celebration event and its importance in educating the next generation and community about the work and carrying that forward to the future.

Charlie de La Chapelle, Yakima Basin Storage Alliance (YSBA): Charlie reflected on a meeting that Wendy Christensen hosted in 2012 about prioritizing different stretches of the Yakima River. At the time, YSBA noted that the lower river was a problem and wanted more conversations about that area. He mentioned that everyone would have been pleased to hear about the Workgroup's progress in addressing those issues in the lower river. Charlie's asked for an update on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Kachess.

Scott Revell, Roza Irrigation District: Scott reflected on Roza's challenging season, which included turning the system off for 10 days in May. Roza leased 12,600 acre-feet and was grateful that Reclamation was able to reimburse most of the funding to replenish their drought fund. Roza is "currently running at a trickle". Sixty percent of crops are harvested after September 15, many are running late, and about eight percent are fallow due to market forces. He requested additional clarity regarding the flush/pulse end results on conservation water.

Crystal Elliot-Perez, Trout Unlimited (Alternate to Theo Burgoon): Crystal thanked Phil Rigdon and the Yakama Nation for hosting the Workgroup meeting and appreciated all the great work happening within the basin.

David Felman, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District: He thanked the presenters and Workgroup members for all the good work.

Cindy Boen, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE): She appreciated the discussion and presentations. Cindy also noted that their Section 1135 study is under review with USACE's policy office and thanked the various partners and agencies for contributing to that study.

Urban Eberhart, KRD: Urban reflected on the early days of YBIP and the relationships and collaborations formed to help resolve issues within the basin then and today.

Alex Conley, YBFWRB: Alex was impressed by the focus on the lower river and alluded to the basin's history and projects that dealt with challenging issues. He shared that there's a lot of good work and tools to build on to be successful.

Mike Livingston, WDFW: Mike pointed to the opportunities, timing, and science used to guide projects within the basin. He noted that YBIP is helping everyone get it all done.

Joe Blodgett, Yakama Nation: Joe appreciated the discussion regarding the YBIP's seven elements and alignment with the Yakama Nation. He admired Councilmember Takala for attending the Workgroup meeting. Joe also noted that capacity is an ongoing issue and will be required to push projects forward in the basin.

Tom Tebb, Ecology: Tom shared that there are still challenges in the lower river but is grateful for the partnerships and collaboration that will help solve these issues in the basin. He thanked the Yakama Nation for hosting the Workgroup meeting.

Wendy Christensen, Reclamation: Wendy also thanked the Yakama Nation for hosting and the presenters for the Workgroup meeting.

Upcoming Meeting

The next Workgroup meeting is scheduled for Dec. 11, 2024, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Yakima Valley College Conference Center (1704 W Nob Hill Boulevard, Yakima, WA 98902).

Attendance

Workgroup Members:

Adam Fyall, Benton County (Alternate to Commissioner Will McKay)
Alex Conley, Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board
Amanda McKinney, Yakima County Commissioner
Brandon Parsons, American Rivers
Charlie de La Chapelle, Yakima Basin Storage Alliance
Chris Duke, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Cindy Boen, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Cory Wright, Kittitas County Commissioner
Craig Haskell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Crystal Elliot-Perez, Trout Unlimited (Alternate to Theo Burgoon)
David Felman, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District
David Haws, Yakima County (Alternate to Commissioner Amanda McKinney)
Jason McShane, Kennewick Irrigation District and Lower River Subcommittee Chair
Jeff Tayer, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and Habitat Subcommittee Chair
Jim Milton, Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District (Alternate to Travis Okelberry)
Joe Blodgett, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Kathryn Furr, U.S. Forest Service (Alternate to David Farmer)
Mike Livingston, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
Mike Shane, City of Yakima
Peter Dykstra, Watershed Lands Conservation Subcommittee Chair
Phil Rigdon, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Scott Revell, Roza Irrigation District and Water Use Subcommittee Chair
Sean Gross, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (Alternate to Justin Yeager)
Seth Defoe, Kennewick Irrigation District
Tom Tebb, Washington State Department of Ecology
Urban Eberhart, Kittitas Reclamation District
Wendy Christensen, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Other Attendees:

Andrew Matala, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Anna Marandi, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Arden Thomas, Kittitas County
Becky Gutshall, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Bill Gale, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Brandon Rogers, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Brian Boyd, Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District
Bruce Sully, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Cameron Mesplie, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Chad Stuart, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Chris Lynch, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Chris Maykut, Friends of Bumping Lake
Chris Perra, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Curt Strifert, Columbia Irrigation District
Cynthia Carlstad, Northwest Hydraulic Consultants
Dale Bambrick, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service
Danielle Squeochs, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Dave Fisher, U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
David Blodgett, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
David Bowen, Washington State Department of Ecology
David E. Ortman
David Fast, Yakama Nation Fisheries
David Lind, Wakish
E.S. Packard
Graysen Squeochs, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Hannah Baumbach, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Hermann Ambion, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Jack Sagaser
Jamie Mooney, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Jason Douglas, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Jason McCormick, Washington Water Trust
Jenna Scholz, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Jeremy Takala, Tribal Councilmember, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
John Crotty, Kennewick Irrigation District
John Martin, Yakama Nation Fisheries
John Reeves, Save Lake Kachess
John Stuhlmiller, Washington State Water Resources Association
Justin Harter, Naches-Selah Irrigation District
Justin Jacob
Kelsey Green, Consultant
Madison Roy, Washington State Department of Agriculture
Marcella Appel, Benton Conservation District
Mark Johnston, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Matt Cook, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Melissa Downes, Washington State Department of Ecology
Merritt Mitchell, Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group
Michael Coffey, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Michael Horner, Washington State Department of Ecology
Michael Porter, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Michelle Mercer, Benton County
Mike Bromund, Rubicon Water
Questen Inghram, Yakima Herald
Raquel Crowley, Office of U.S. Senator Patty Murray
Richard Evans, Office of U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Richard Visser, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Ron Cowin, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District
Sage Park, Roza Irrigation District
Sanjay Barik, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife
Sara Vickers, Kittitas Reclamation District
Scott Turner, Washington State Department of Ecology
Sepideh Sadeghi, Washington State Department of Ecology
Shane Leonard, Kennewick Irrigation District
Shawna Warehime, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Shubha Pandit, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Stuart Crane, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Tim Poppleton, Washington State Department of Ecology
Tom Elliott, Yakama Nation Fisheries

Where to Find Workgroup Information

Meeting materials, notes, presentations, and materials submitted during public comment for each Workgroup meeting will be posted on Reclamation's project website: <http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/yrbwep/2011integratedplan/index.html>. A list of information sources, many available online, is also posted on the website.

If you need help finding an information source, contact those listed at the top of page 1 of these notes or Anna Marandi at HDR Engineering, Inc., (206) 288-1861 or anna.marandi@hdrinc.com.