

Yakama Nation Perspectives

Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project
Workgroup Meeting

September 10, 2025



Jeremy Takala
Yakama Nation Tribal Council
Fish and Wildlife Committee Chair

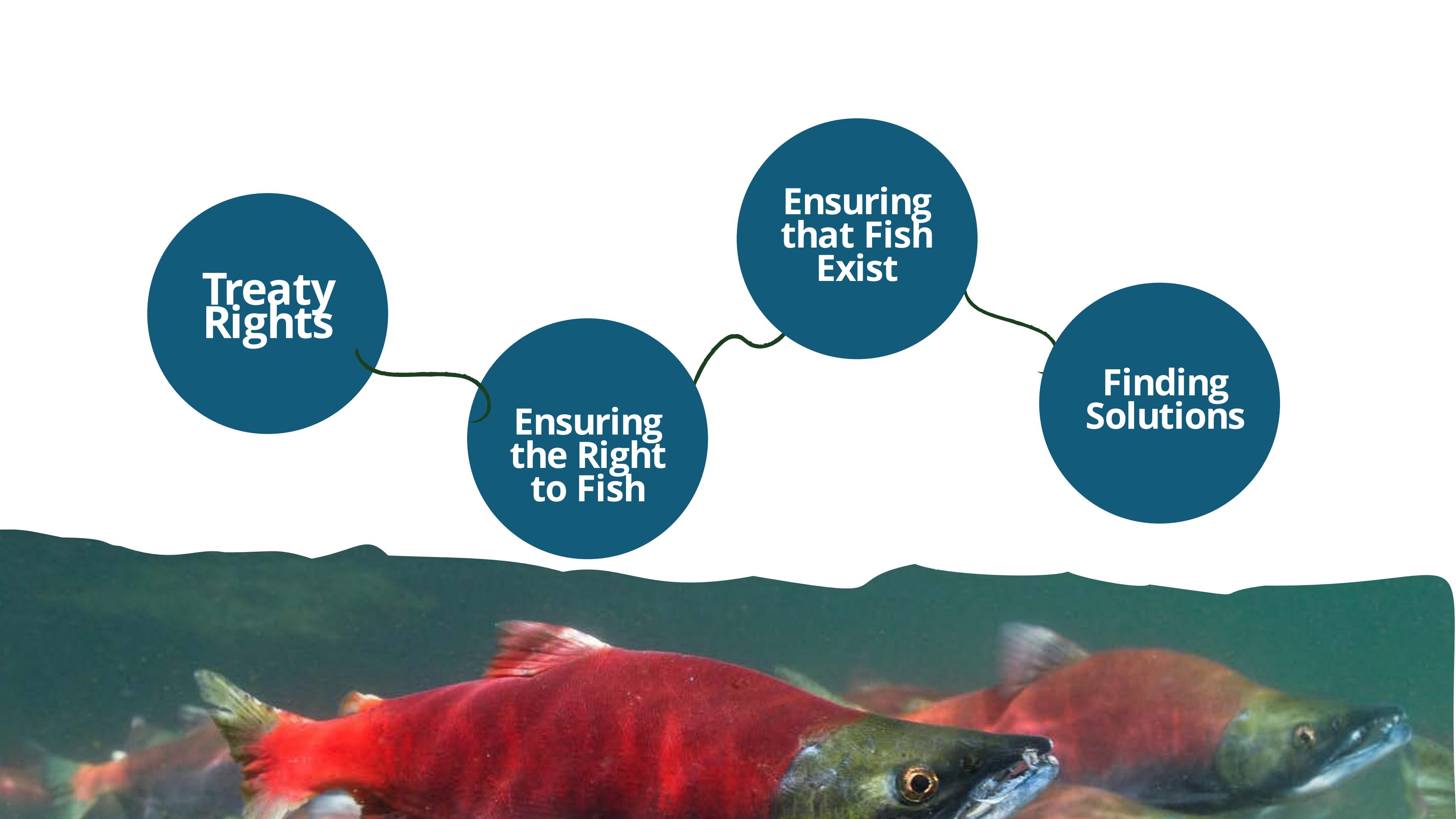
David Blodgett III
Yakama Nation Fisheries Manager





THE PLATEAU SEASONAL ROUND





A close-up photograph of several salmon swimming in water. The fish are vibrant red and orange, with darker greenish-blue sides. They are moving towards the right, creating a sense of motion. The water is a deep, clear greenish-blue.

Treaty
Rights

Ensuring
the Right
to Fish

Ensuring
that Fish
Exist

Finding
Solutions

Treaty Rights

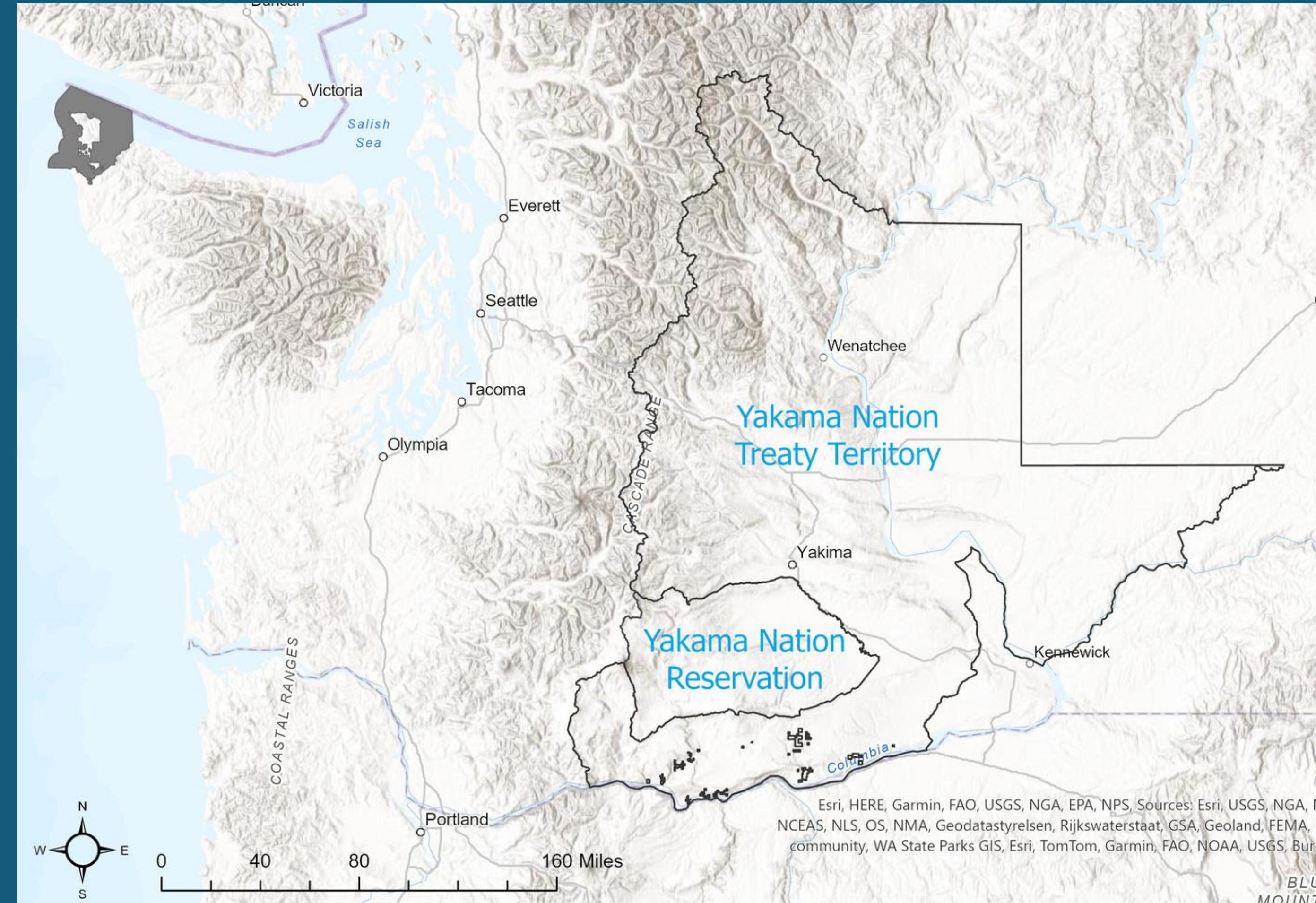
Treaty of 1855 reserved the Yakama Reservation:

“...for the exclusive use and benefit of the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.”

>12 million acres ceded

1.4 million acres reserved

Article III: Right to hunt, fish, gather is protected throughout Ceded and Usual and Accustomed use areas



Fishing and Fish Wars

U.S. v Winans (1905)

Ensured access to fishing sites

U.S. v Oregon (1969)

U.S. District Judge Robert Belloni of Portland ruled that Indians were entitled to a “fair share” of the harvestable surplus of fish in the Columbia, based on language in the treaties of 1855

Toppenish, WA -- "Salmonscam" defendants go to court Mon. am. from tribal jail. Front row: David Sohappy and Mathew McConnville. Rear: David Sohappy Jr., Wilbur Stockish + Leroy Yocash. CHECK FILE MUGS OF LAST 2 - I'll call w/ definite IDs on them. PHOTO BY Randy L. Rasmussen

4/13/87





Billy Frank Jr. (1973)

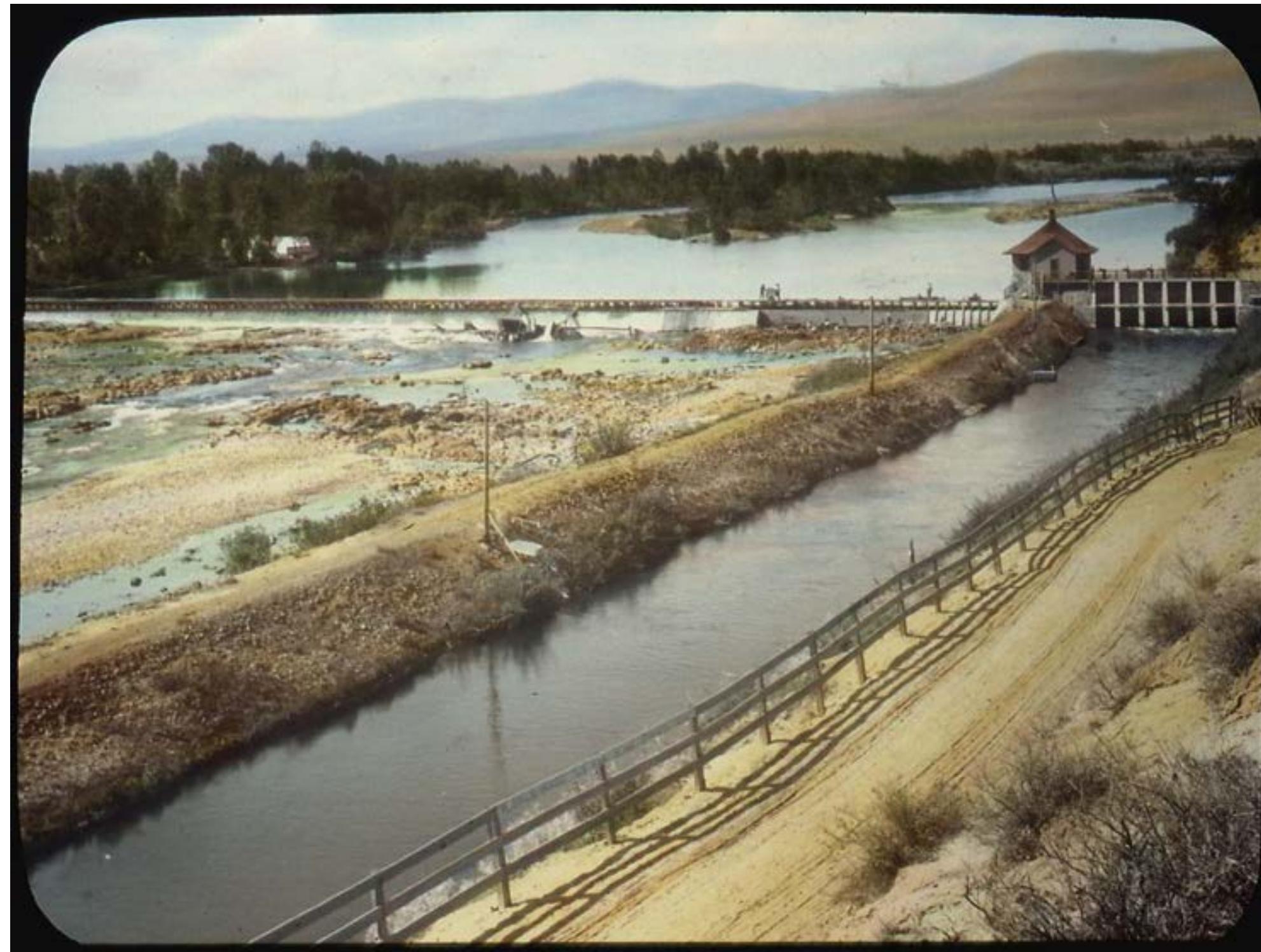
The Boldt Decision

US v. Washington (1974)

The judge assigned to the case was George Boldt, who issued his first decision on Feb. 12, 1974. The decision gave the tribes who were parties to the treaties the right to half the catch, with the tribes and the state managing the fishery together.

50% of zero is still zero

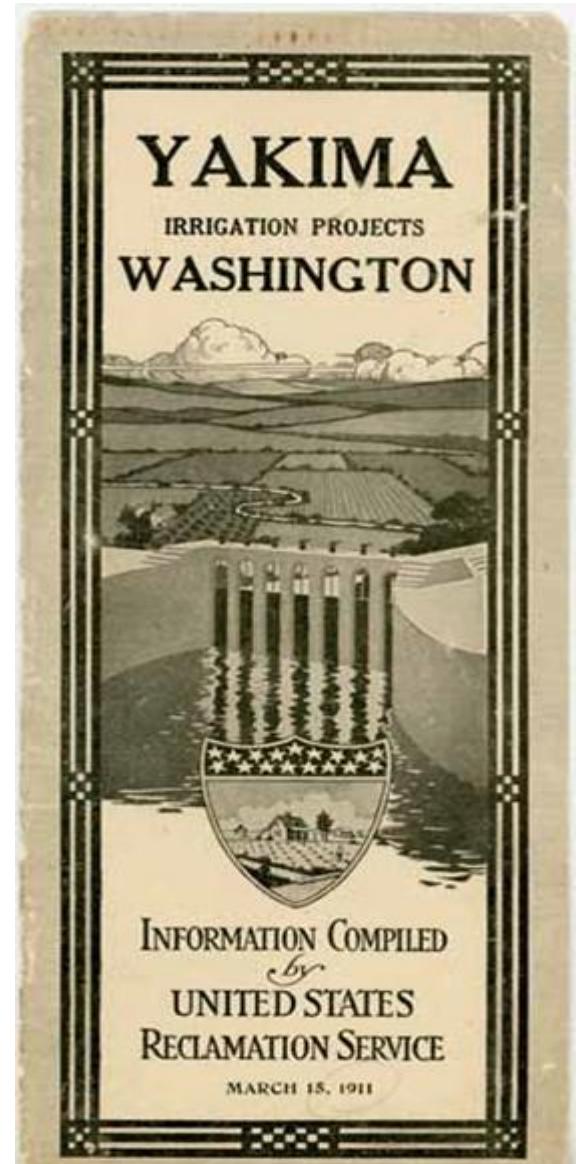
Water in the Yakima River Basin



Yakima River being diverted into the Sunnyside Canal (Early 1900s)

50 Years after the signature of the Treaty (1903) settlers had:

- Diverted the entire natural flow of the Yakima River for irrigation
- Constructed crib dams at Keechelus, Kachess and Cle Elum Lakes
- Requested the Bureau of Reclamation to establish the Yakima Irrigation Project



Yakima Basin Reclamation Project

Irrigation Expansion (1905 to 1951)

- Reclamation expanded operations to serve six irrigation districts

Impacts to fisheries

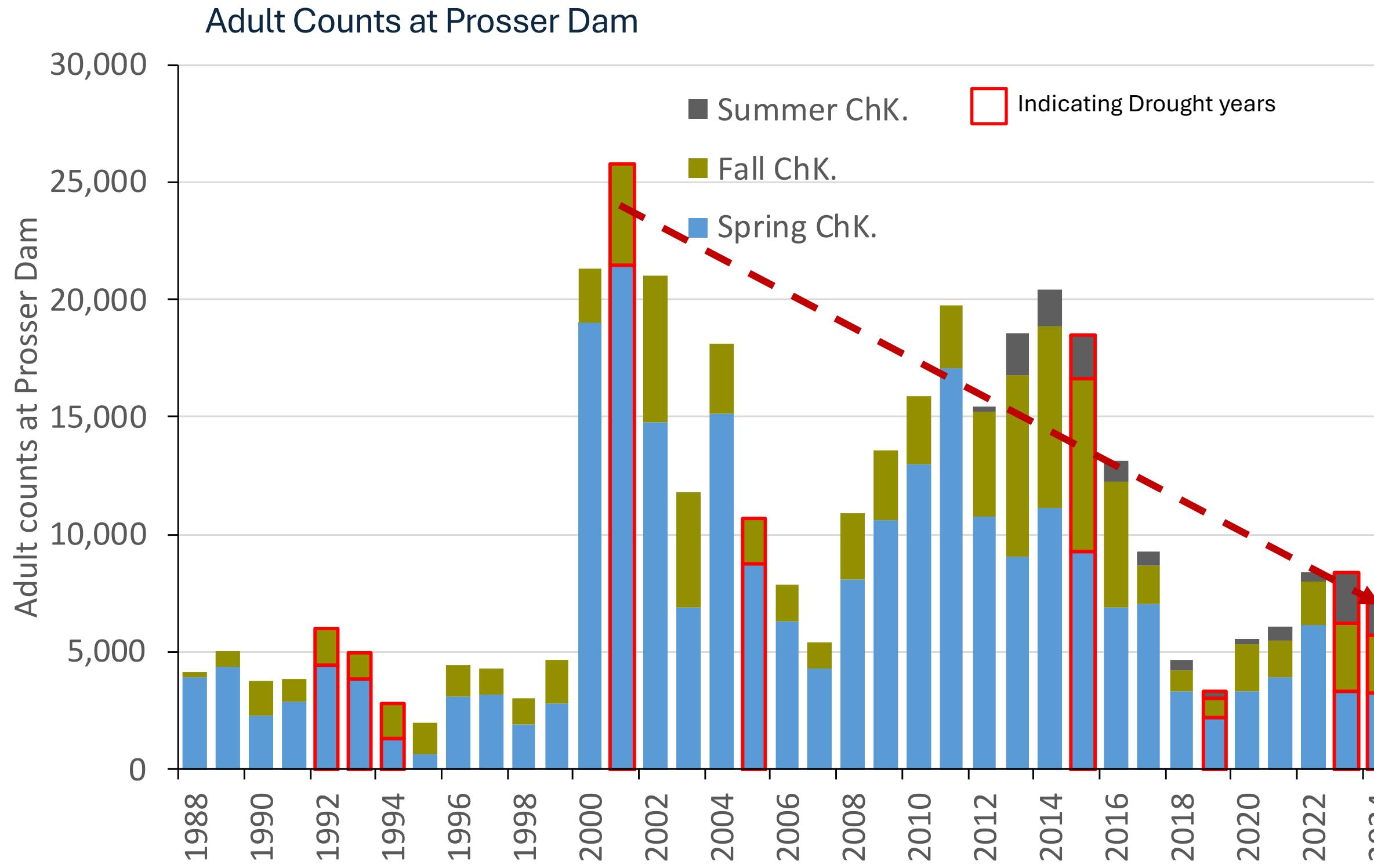
- 1910 - passage to major headwater streams blocked by dams
- Sockeye were extirpated, as juveniles need lake environment for rearing
- Salmon runs decimated



Top: Rimrock Dam
Construction (~1920)

Left: Bumping Crib Dam
(~1905)

Fisheries Drought Impacts



Note – Trendline is intended for demonstration and not derived from statistical analysis of the data

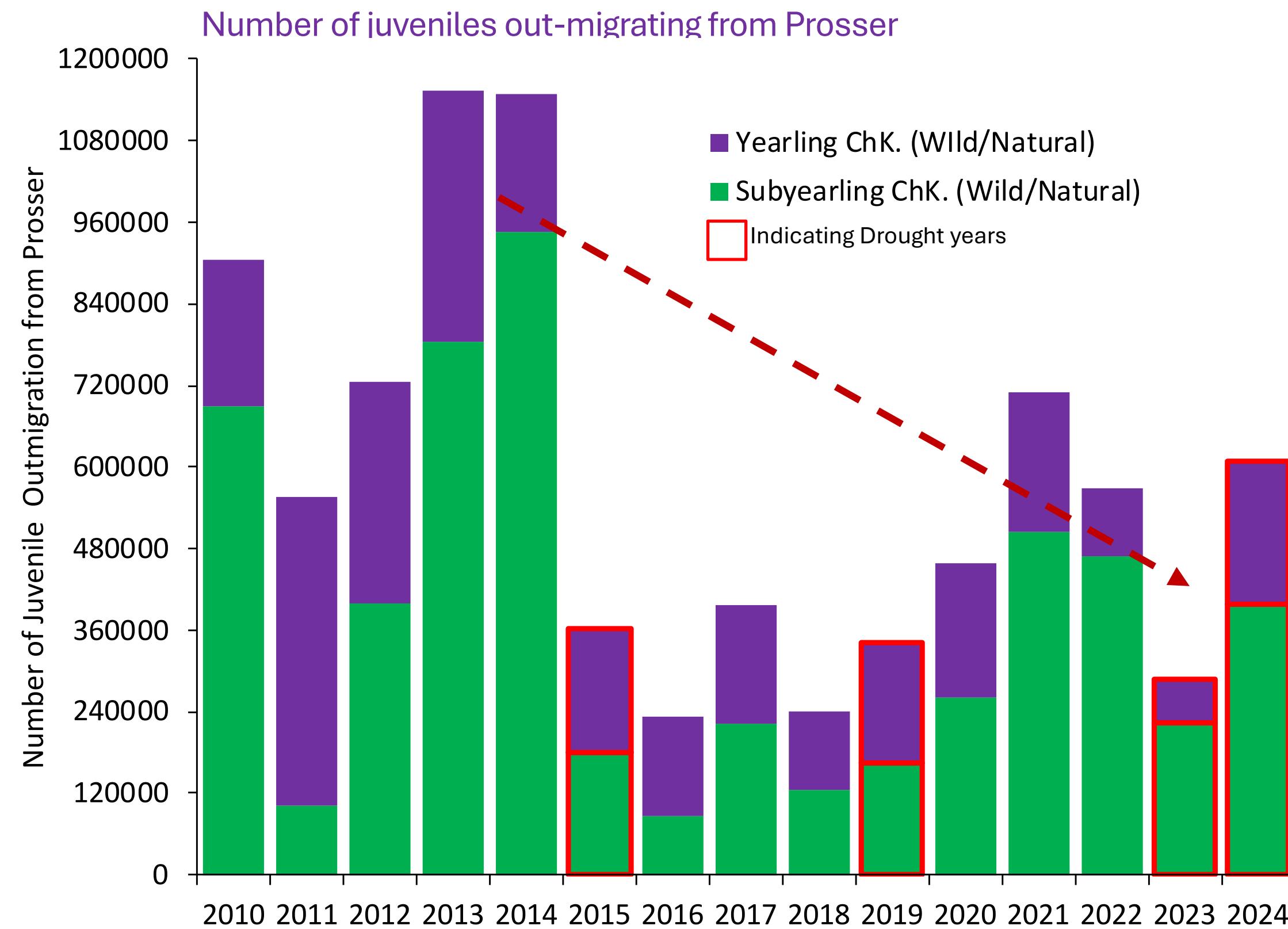


2024 Yakima River Fish Kill at the
Yakima River Delta
85 fish observed at surface
Likely more than 700 fish

Fisheries Drought Impacts

Juvenile fish numbers have not recovered from the 2015 drought

Year-over-year droughts place the viability of entire populations at risk



Thank you



Photo Credit: Wenatchee World

POM POM RM40 RESTORATION PROJECT TOPPENISH CREEK

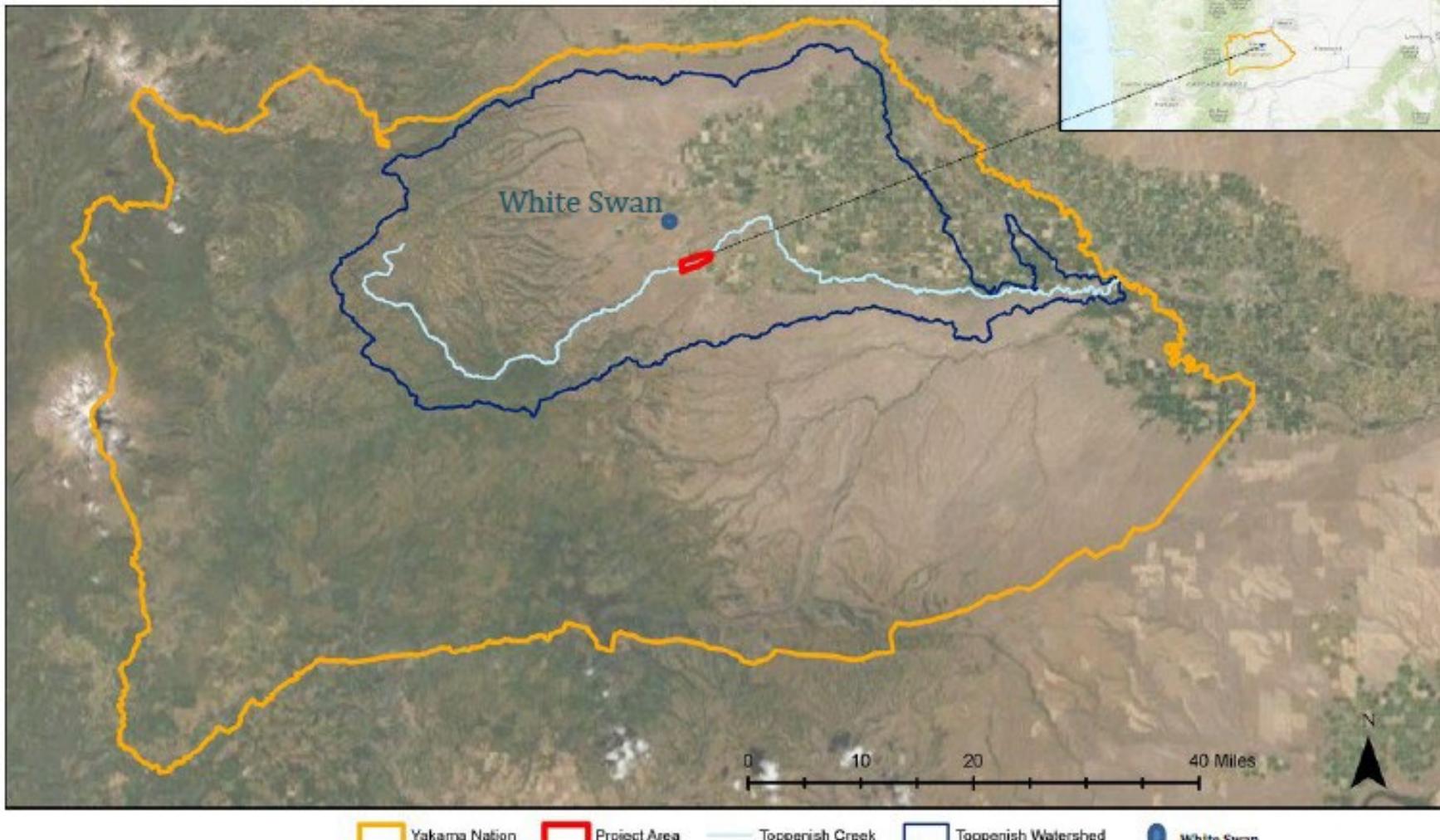
Madeleine Eckmann and Audrey Scott

Yakama Reservation Watershed Project

9/10/2025



Pom Pom Road Project Location



Existing Conditions

- Severe Incision
- Lack of water availability during summer low flows
- Lack of suitable Steelhead rearing habitat
- High water temperatures
- Lack of cover habitat



Phase 1

“Bridge/Culverts”

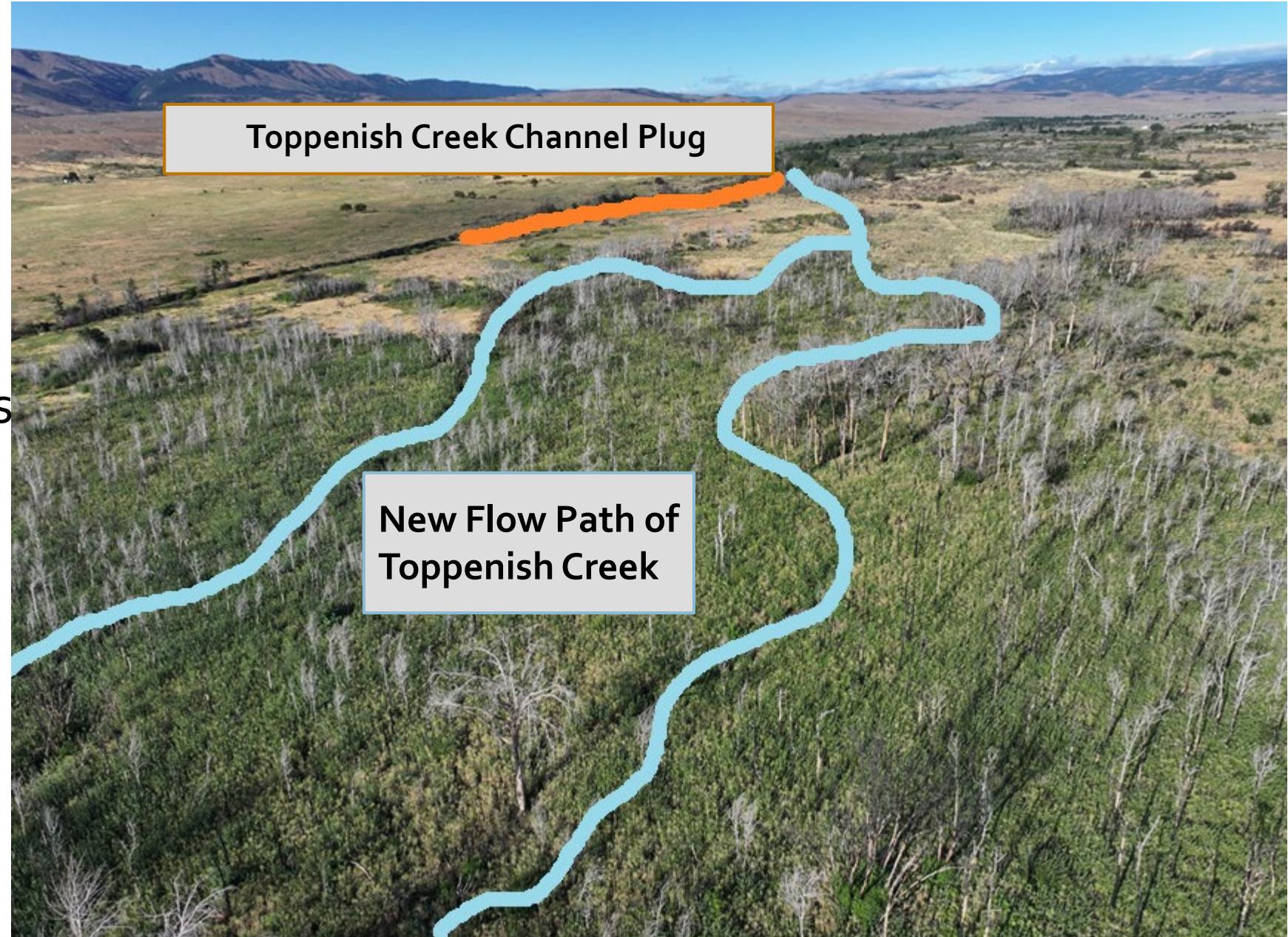
Nov. 2025 – Dec. 2026

- Three new 21-ft precast concrete box culverts to increase flood conveyance
- New 150-ft concrete girder supported bridge (existing bridge will be left in place)



Phase 2 “Restoration” June 2026 – Dec 2026

- Reconnect historic floodplain channels
- Placement of log jams and post assisted log structures
- Plugging existing alignment of Toppenish Creek
- Revegetating fire disturbed areas and riparian habitats



Biological Benefits



Current condition of Toppenish Creek in mid to late- summer.



Example of a post restoration floodplain channel with excellent riparian vegetation, cover habitat and perennial groundwater connectivity.

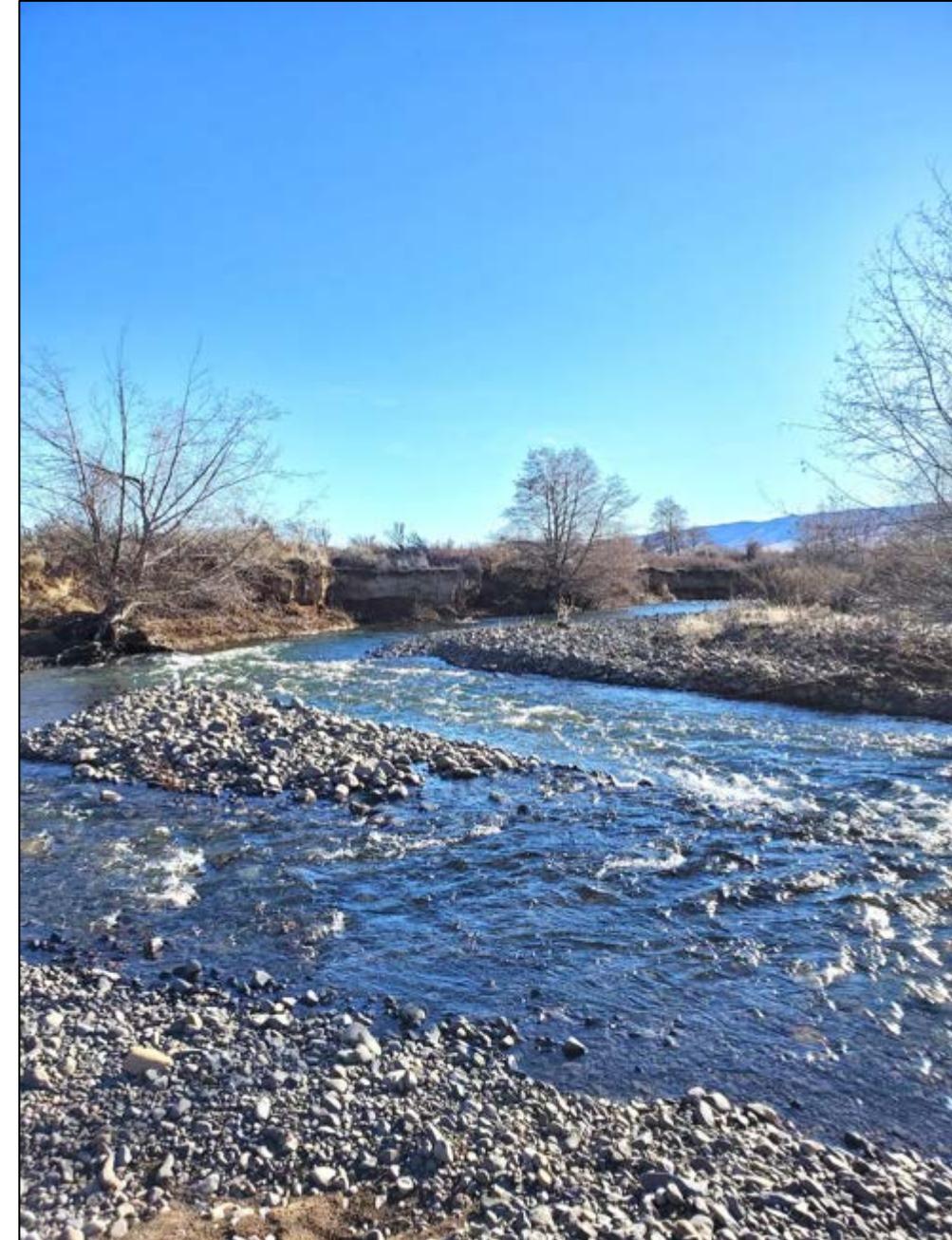
Slide Ranch Fire Effects

1. Updates to Modeling
2. Restoration Design Changes
3. Bridge/ Road Design Changes



COMPLETED TO DATE

- 100% Post-Fire Modeling
- 100% Final post-fire restoration designs
- 100% Bridge/road post-fire designs
- Completed environmental compliance
- Completed section 106
- Construction RFB drafted
- Bridge construction (Phase 1) to commence in fall 2025
- Restoration construction (Phase 2) to commence in summer 2026





Thank You
Questions?

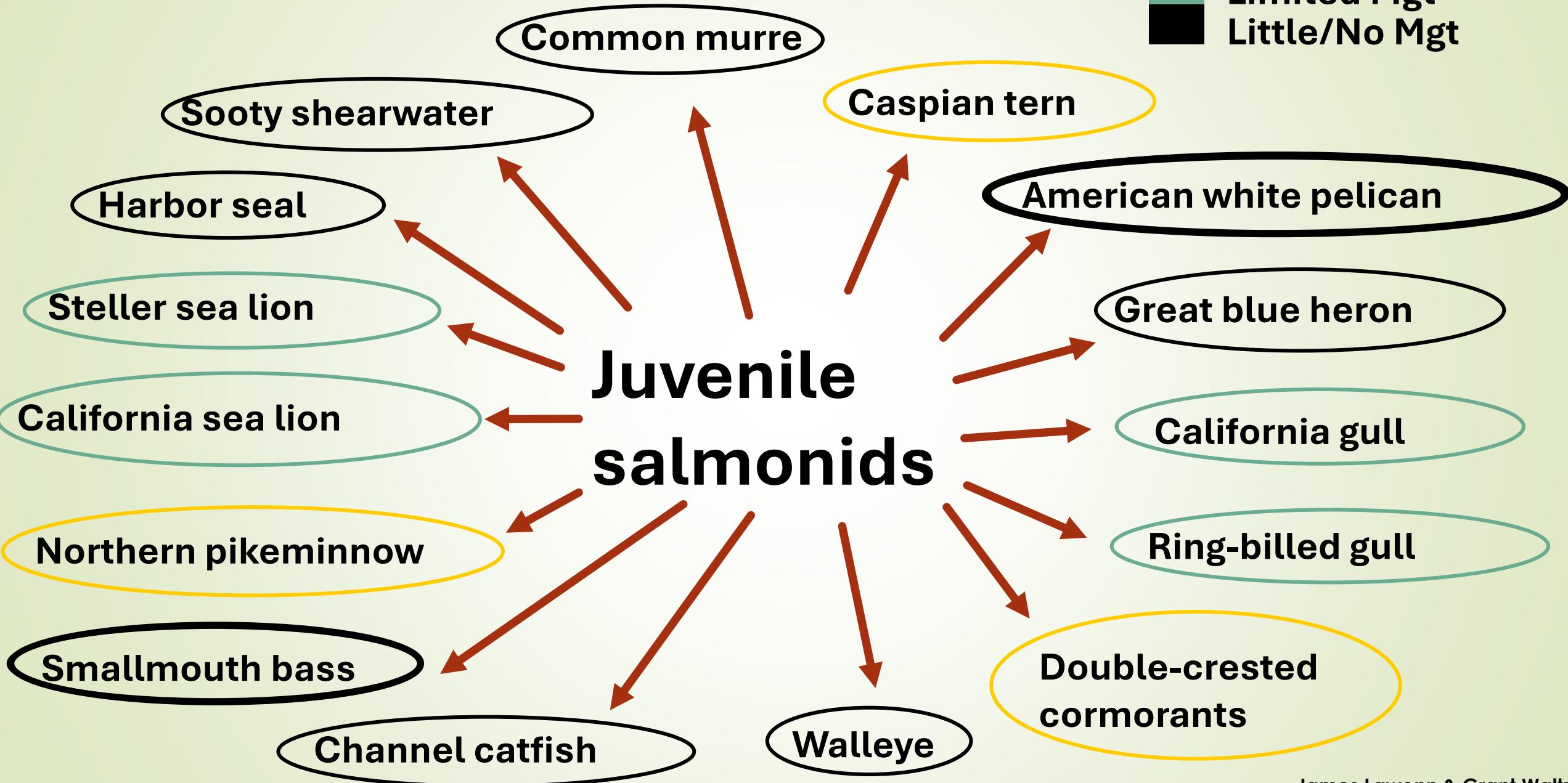
Yakima River Fish & Avian Predation



Trenton De Boer – YNF
Shelley Johnson - USGS



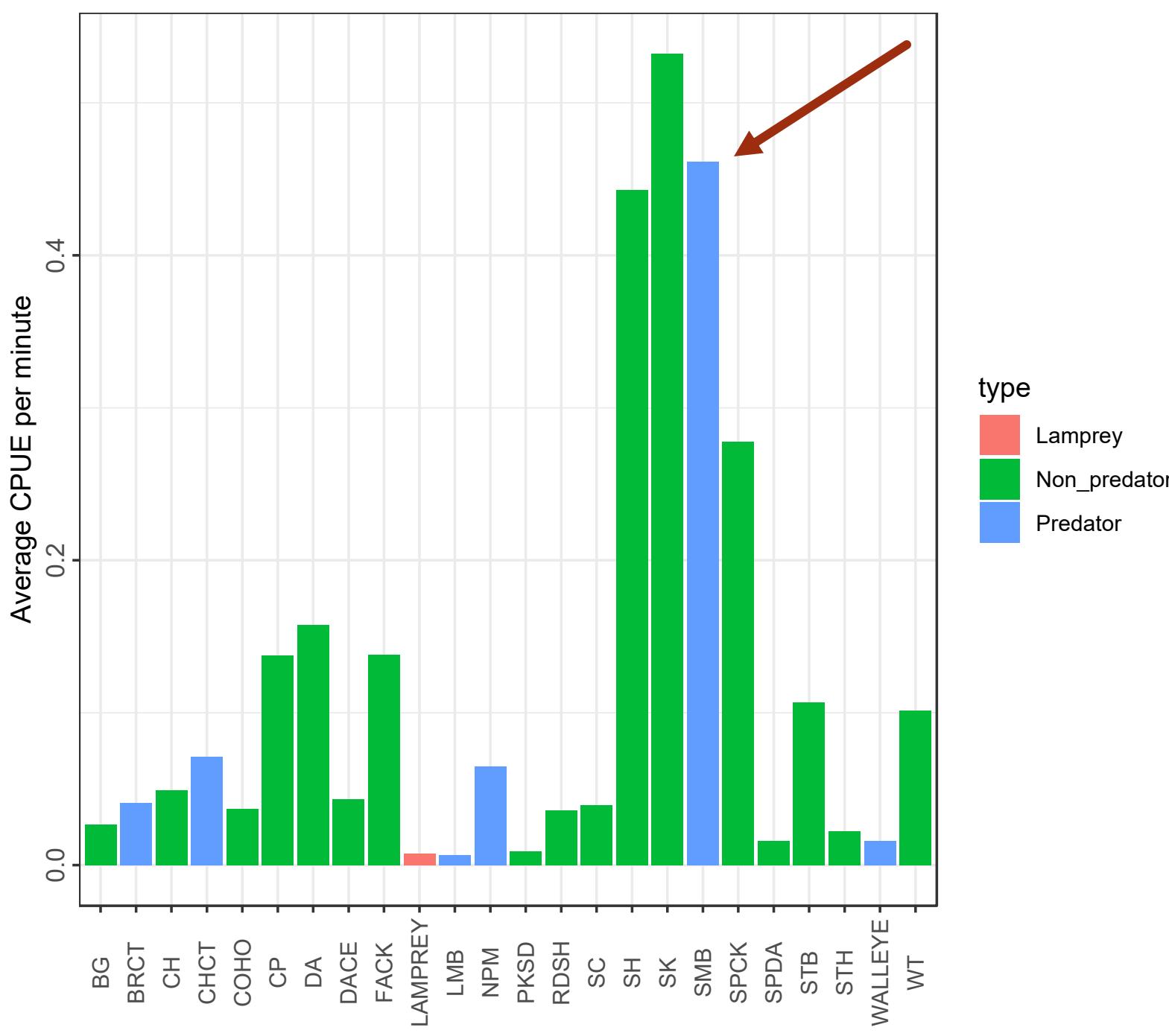
Intensive Mgt
Limited Mgt
Little/No Mgt

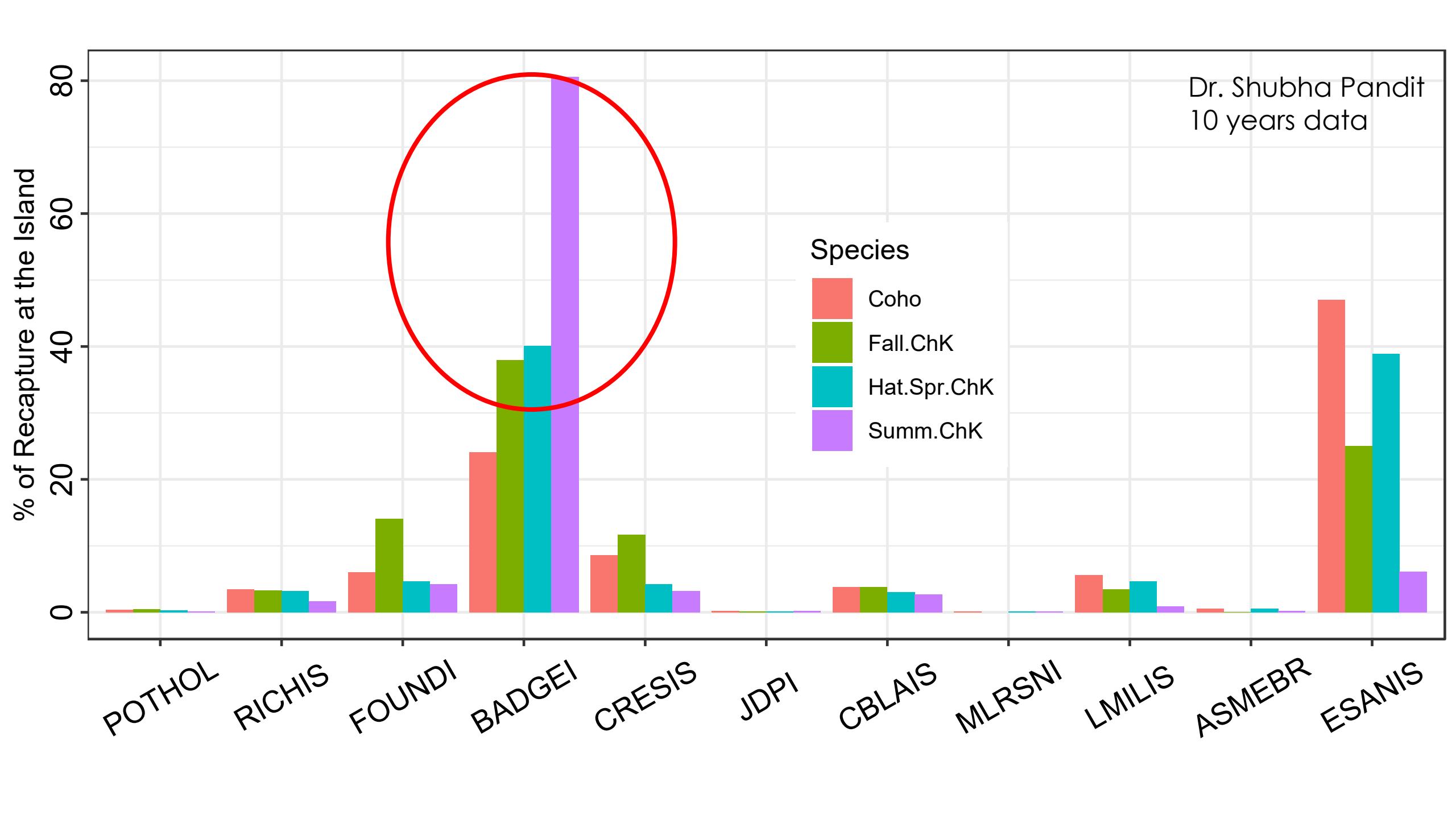


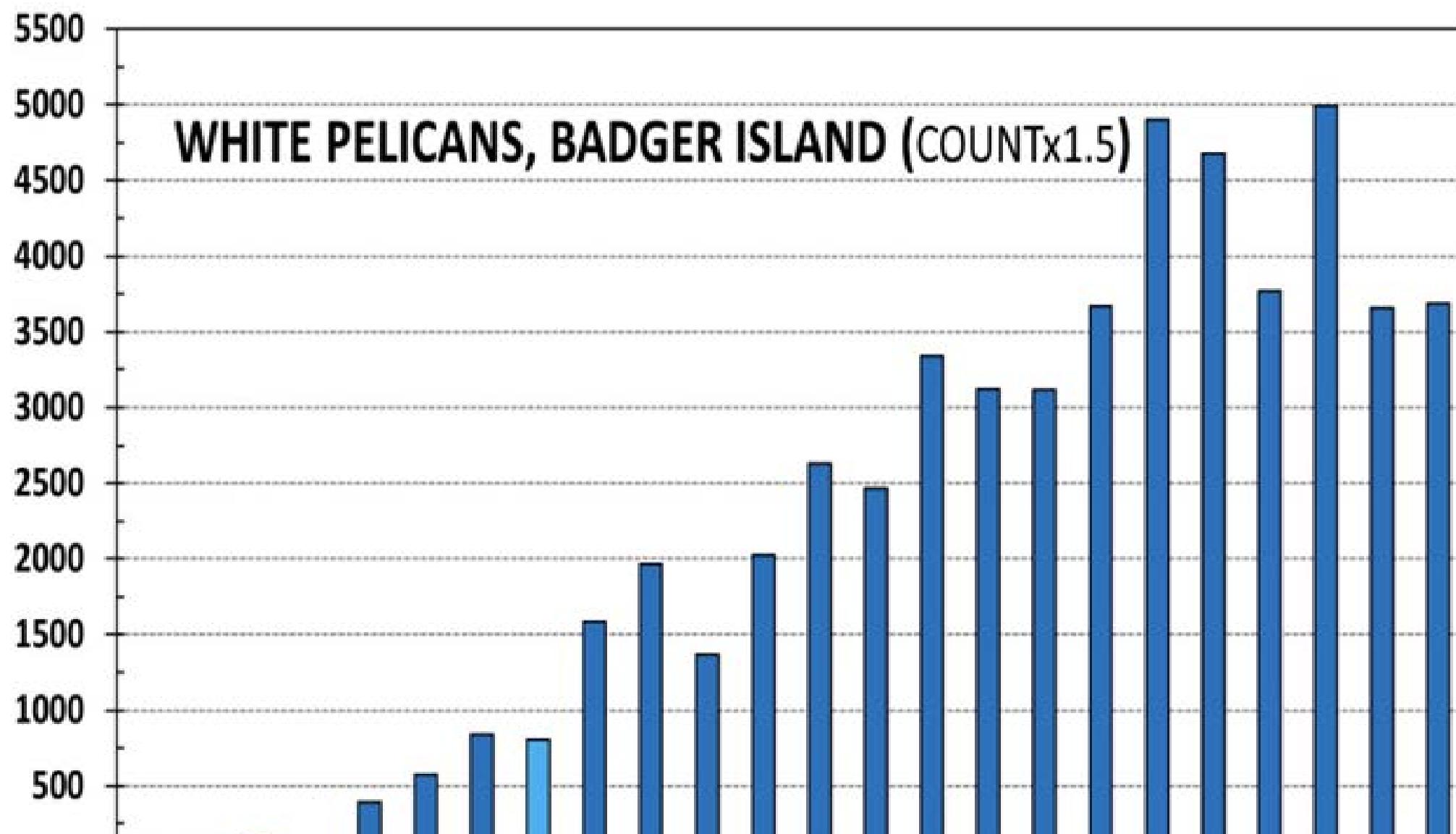


Duane Raver - USFWS









Stinson, DW. (2022)

What we know so far

- ▶ **Salmon smolts are a substantial portion of pelican diets at some locations during spring**
- ▶ Smallmouth bass are also a key food for pelicans
- ▶ Challenges to estimating smallmouth bass population size, measuring the efficacy of removal actions

What's next

- Quantify predation by smallmouth bass and pelicans
- Quantify the impact of smallmouth bass removals on population size and smolt predation



Science to inform management – collaborations with the USGS



- ▶ Why? Food webs are complex!
- ▶ Measuring the impacts of management actions in real time allows for adaptation
- ▶ Results from these studies **directly inform best management approaches** for Yakama Nation to improve survival in the lower basin
- ▶ Science can inform innovative solutions



Lower Yakima River Project Update

Yakama Nation Fisheries
Yakima Integrated Plan Workgroup,
September 2025
Yakama Legends Casino



Michael Porter

Lower Yakima River

Project Coordinator

CATCH & CONSERVE

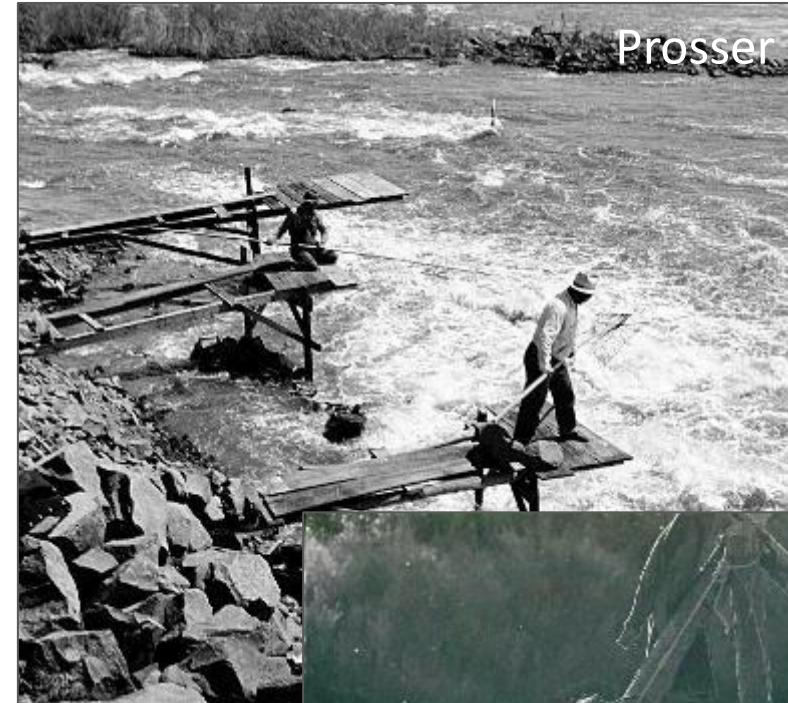


HONOR. PROTECT. RESTORE.

Cultural Importance of Lower Yakima River



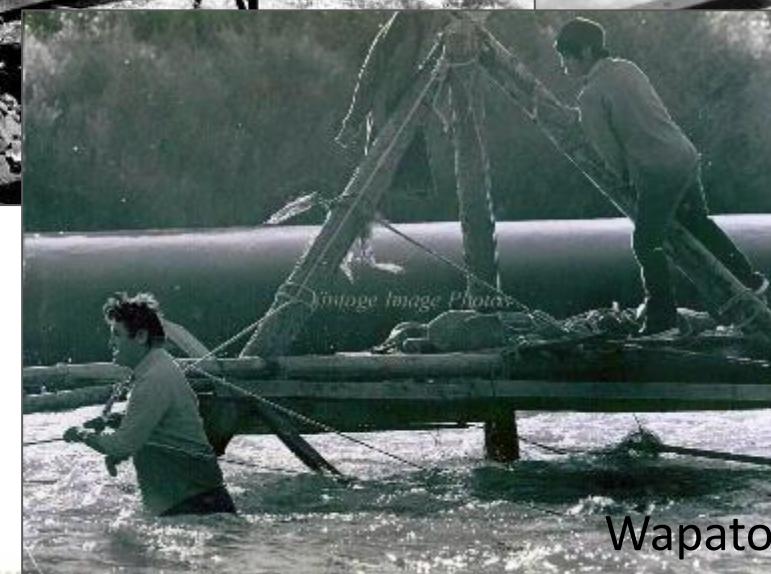
- Regionally significant fisheries at Top Tut (Prosser), natural falls created harvest opportunity
- Large villages and population at Parker
- Utilization since time immemorial continues to this day



Prosser

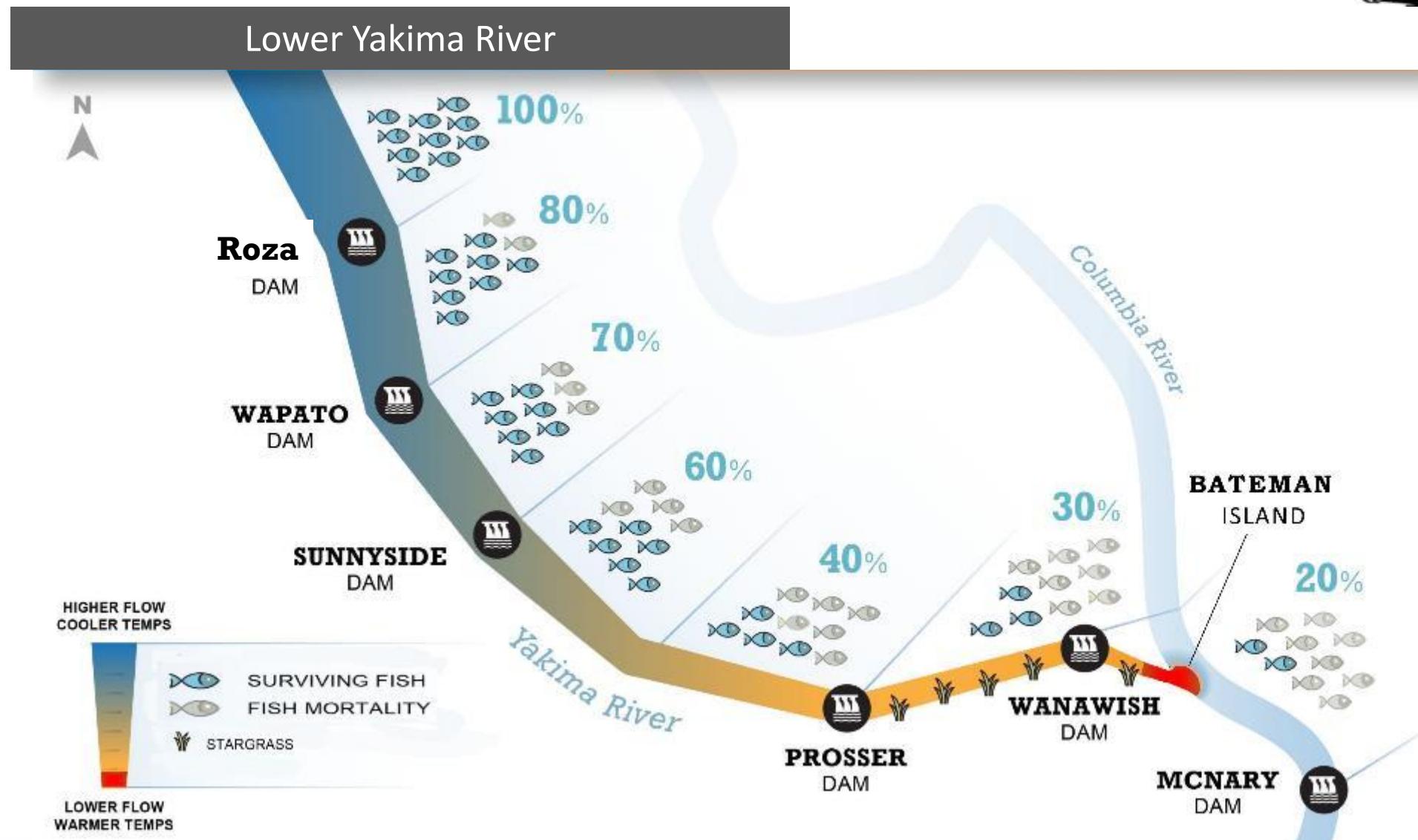


Sunnyside



Wapato

Significantly improving juvenile survival...



Vision and Goals for the Future River

- Migration survival rates allowing for healthy and harvestable stocks of all species
- Infrastructure exerts minimal impact on fish populations
- Flow, habitat, predation rates and water quality support abundant migratory, rearing, and spawning fish populations



Lower Yakima River fish passage is critical to rebuilding salmon and steelhead runs



- Juvenile loss on average is 50% to 70%
- Cannot recover fish runs without major improvements in lower River
- Healthy adult returns depend on dramatically improving lower River passage



Need for integrated, whole system approach-partnerships will be key

- Streamflow-overarching variable
- Diversions
- Water quality
- Predation
- Stargrass
- Habitat



Improving Passage Barriers in the Yakima River Basin

Legend



Yakima River Basin

Projects

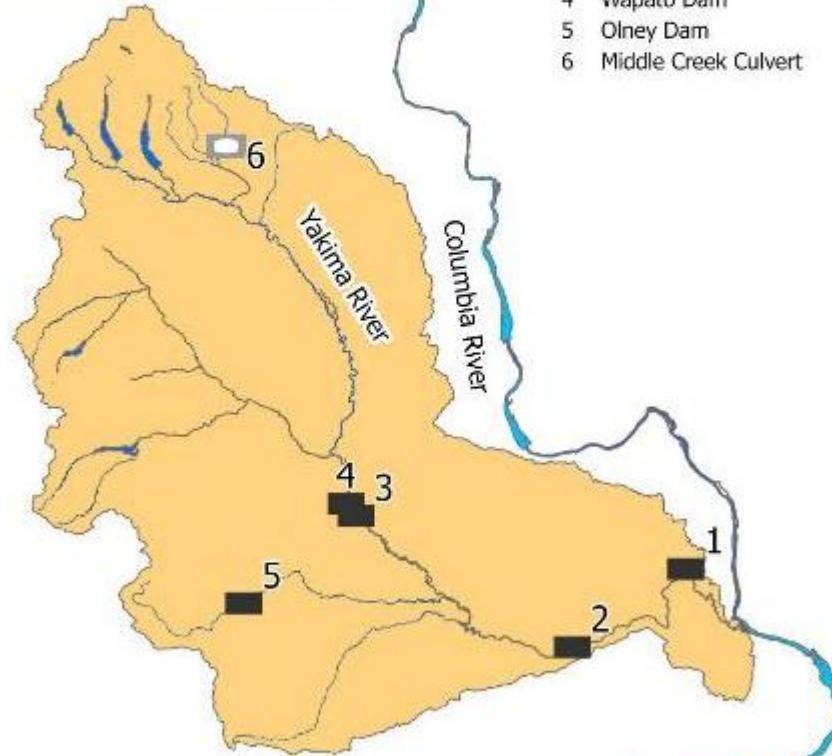
Type

Culvert

Low Head Dam

Name

- 1 Wannawish Dam
- 2 Prosser Dam
- 3 Sunyside Dam
- 4 Wapato Dam
- 5 Olney Dam
- 6 Middle Creek Culvert



Updates for Selected Projects



■ Prosser Dam

■ Wapato Dam

■ Wanawish Dam

■ Bateman Island

Prosser Dam and Diversion





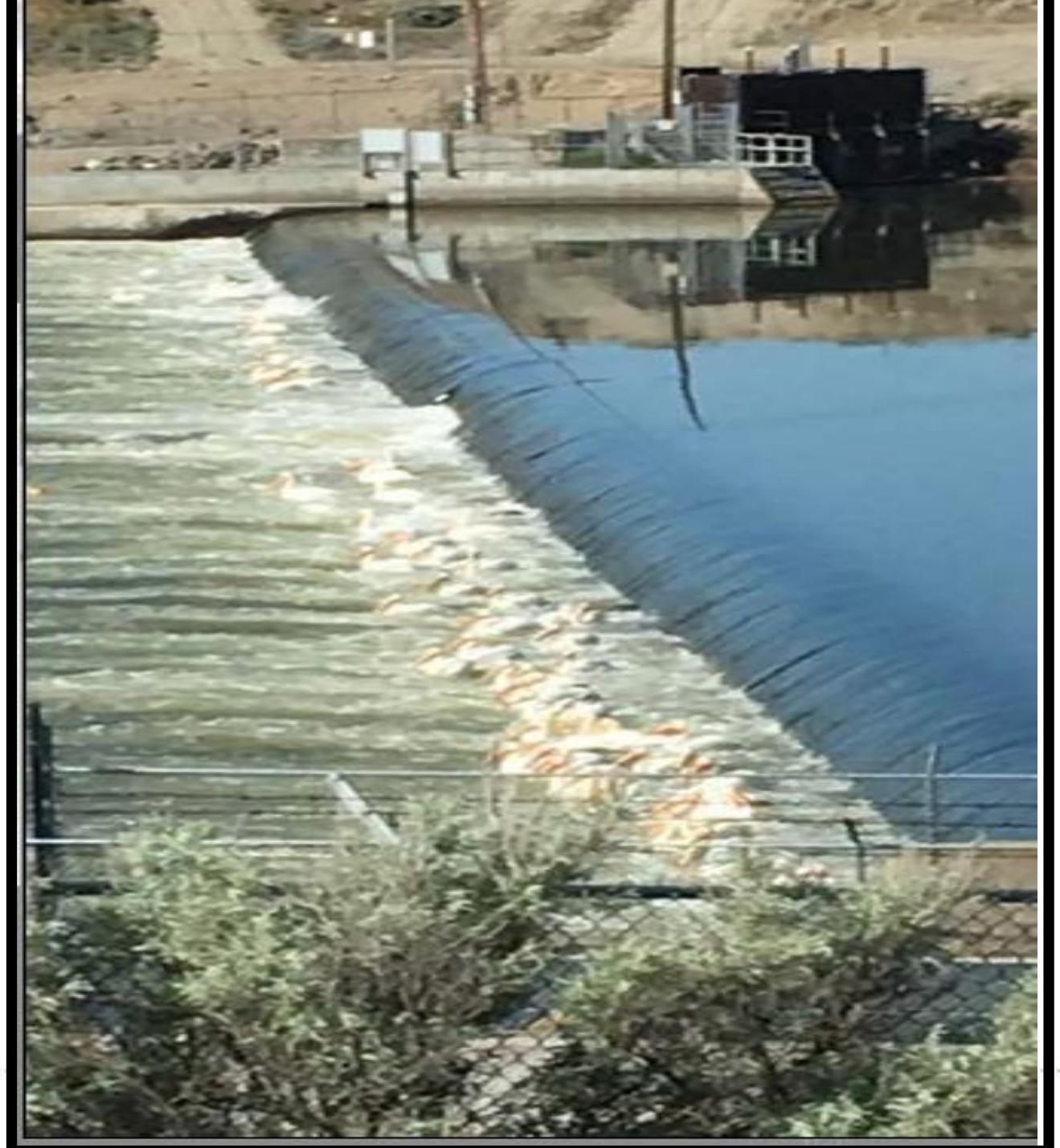
Wapato Dam and Diversion



- Feasibility report expected in early 2025
- Multi-objective: fish passage, irrigation, harvest, river function, flood risk reduction
- Key elements:
 - Headworks replacement
 - Nature-like fishways
 - Adjustable crest with gates
 - Channel restoration

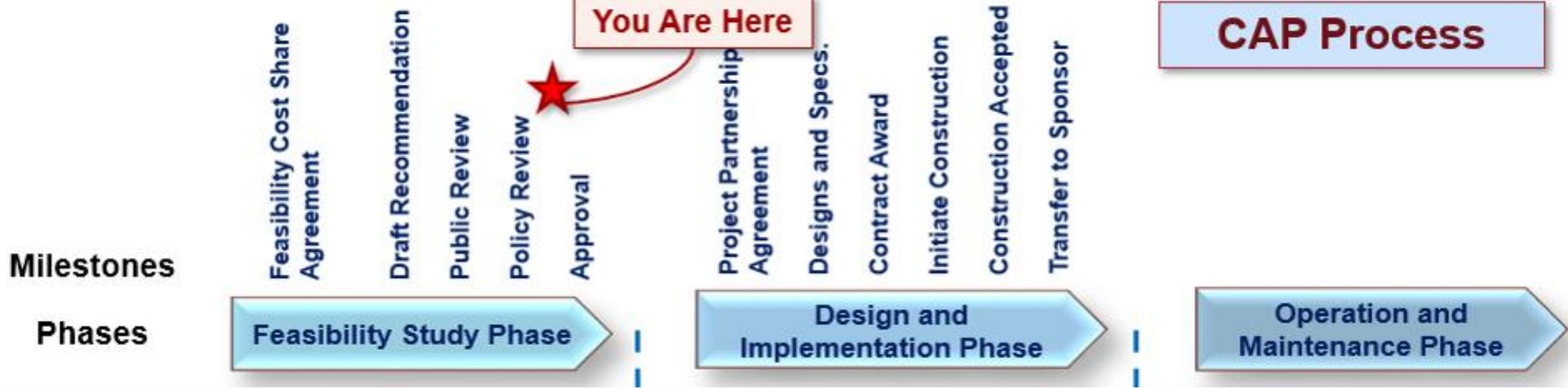
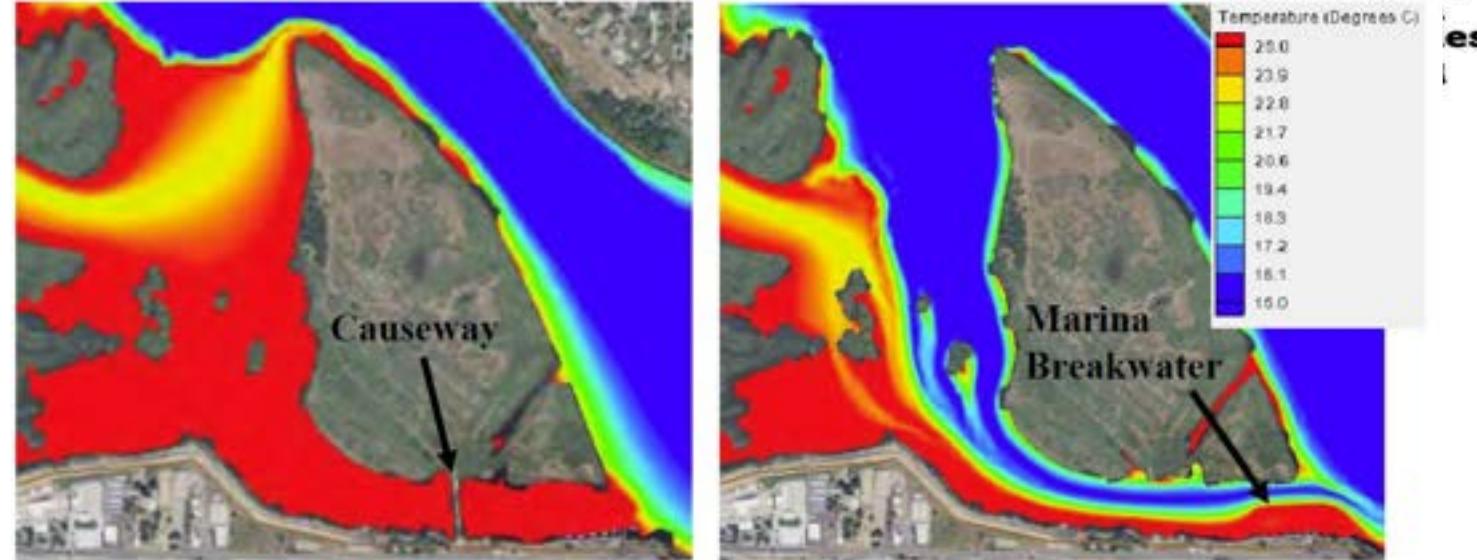
Wanawish Dam





Bateman Island

- Good news! Sediment findings were positive
- Negligible impact on cost and schedule



Smolt Survival

A large school of smolt fish, likely salmonids, are shown swimming in clear, slightly greenish water. The fish are silvery with distinct dark vertical stripes. They are moving in various directions, creating a sense of motion. The background is a blurred view of the water and possibly a rocky or sandy bottom.

Thank You to All of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan Partners



Plus, many others: Benton Conservation District, Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group....

DROUGHT 2025



Urban Eberhart, Secretary - Manager

The Bureau of Reclamation's total water supply forecast for 2025:

- April 3, 2025 – 58% of entitlement.
 - May 5, 2025 – reduced to 51%.
- May 16 – reduced to 48% and pro-rationing begins.
 - June 5 – reduced to 43%.
 - June 16 – increase to 45%.
 - July 24 – reduced to 42%.
 - August 7 – reduced to 40%.
 - Sept. 4 – remains at 40%.



KRD shut off date was August 13, 2025 – 2 months early. Would have ended earlier if not for conservation work preparing for drought.

Washington Department of Ecology issued a Drought Declaration for the Yakima River Basin on April 8, 2025, because of low storage in the five reservoirs that supply water to the region over the summer.



Facts:

- 3rd consecutive drought year.
- 3rd worst drought since 1971.
- Building a climate resilient system is top priority.





KRD'S WATER CONSERVATION EFFORTS
North Branch Lining

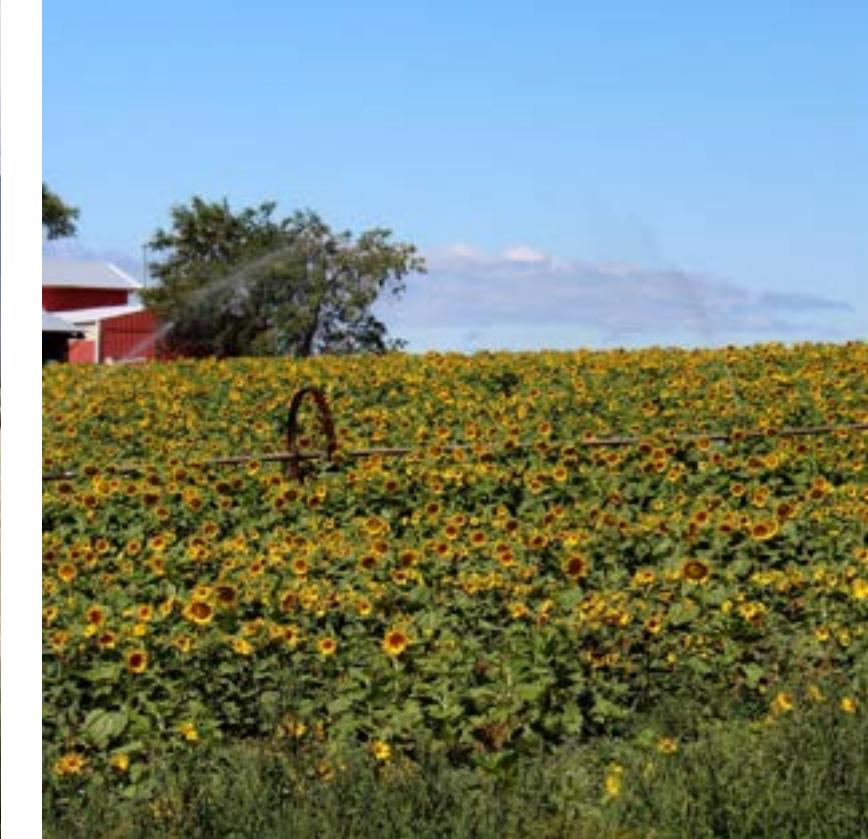


KRD'S WATER CONSERVATION EFFORTS

South Branch Piping

Projects Completed for 2024 Water Season	Water Savings (CFS)	Water Savings (AF)	Feet lined or piped
SB13.6 & SB13.8 Pipeline	3.50	1215.0	20540
North Branch Lining	9.45	3380.7	17146
North Branch above Johnson	4.16	1486.5	9200
South Branch Lining	4.44	1570.0	14100
South Branch Piping	4.86	1725.5	12442
South Branch MRT	0.20	73.0	1500
Total saved by 2024 season:	26.61	9450.6	74928





PRIORITY



Protect our economy and protect the certainty of the water supply for the future of the farms, fish and ecosystem.



2025 Drought Impacts Wapato Irrigation Project Yakama Nation

2025 – Drought Impacts (Summary)

1. Primary Drought Countermeasures
2. Impacts on District Growers
3. Operational & Infrastructure Challenges
4. Financial & Resource Strain
5. Long-Term Planning

2025



2025



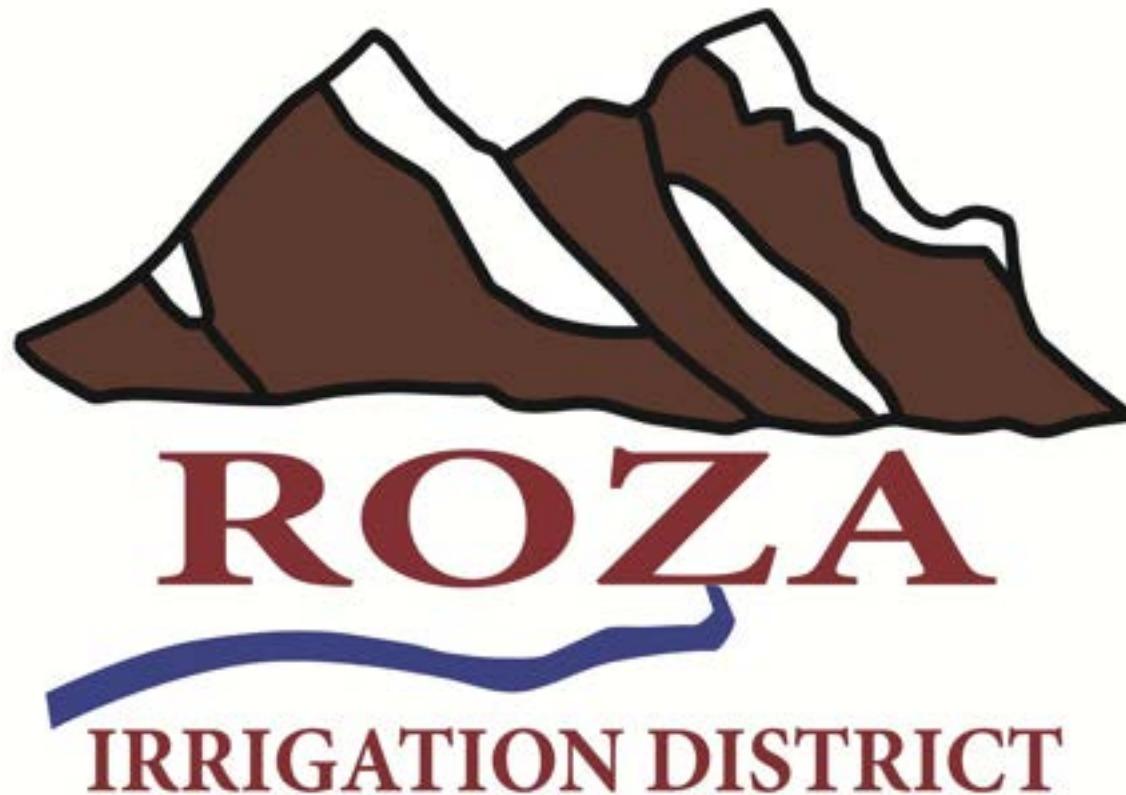
2025



Thank You

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2025 Drought

SAGE PARK
POLICY DIRECTOR
ROZA IRRIGATION DISTRICT
SPARK@ROZA.ORG
509-840-1584



Empty Canal in
May 2025



Roza Canal during shut down during May 2025.



Shutting down
the canal in late
May is not
without risk.



Pump back recovery of water







