

# 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*









**Treaty  
Rights**

**Ensuring  
the Right  
to Fish**

**Ensuring  
that Fish  
Exist**

**Finding  
Solutions**





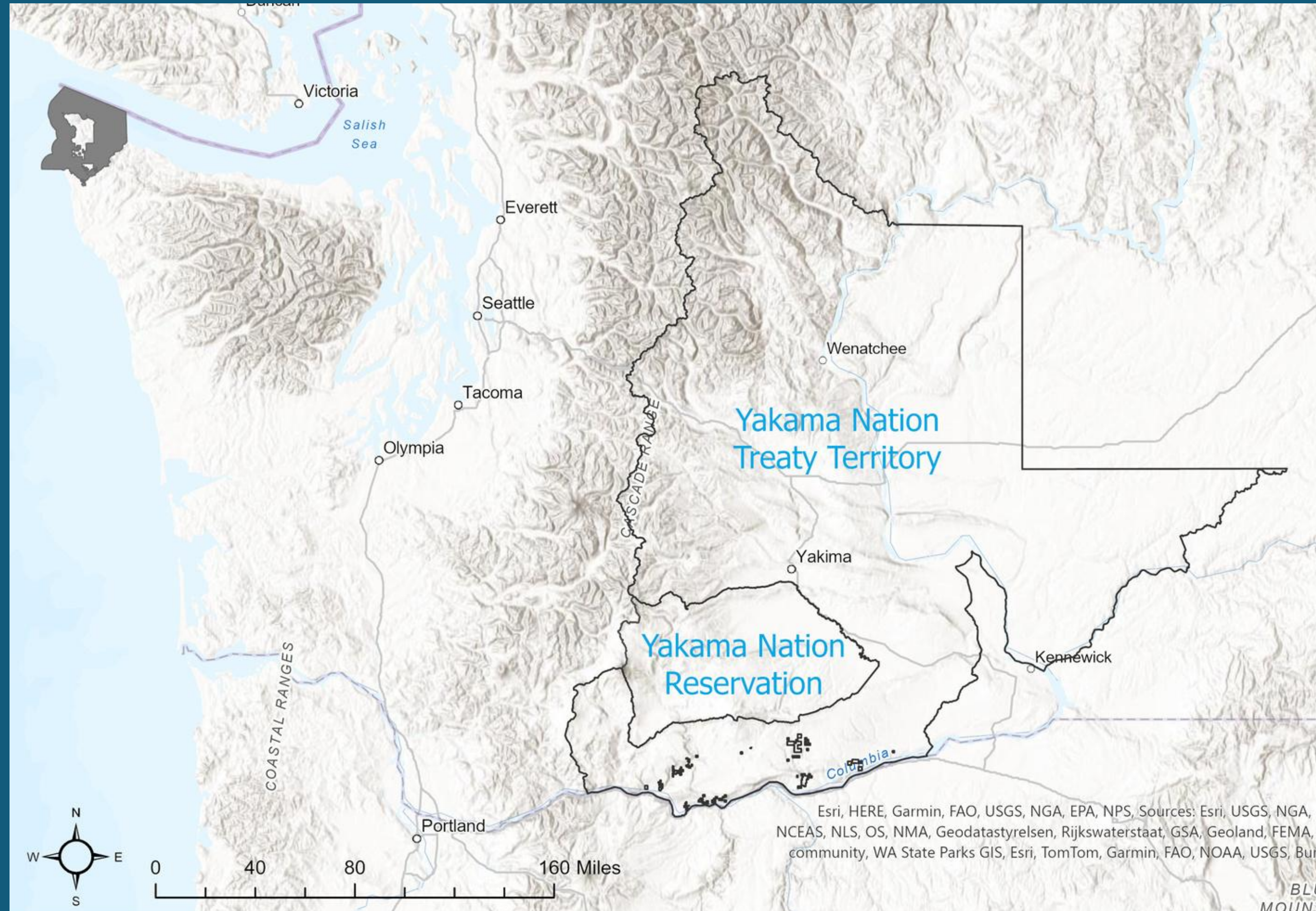
# Treaty Rights

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 Sohapp and Mathew McConville. Rear: David Sohapp Jr., Wilbur  
Slockish + 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

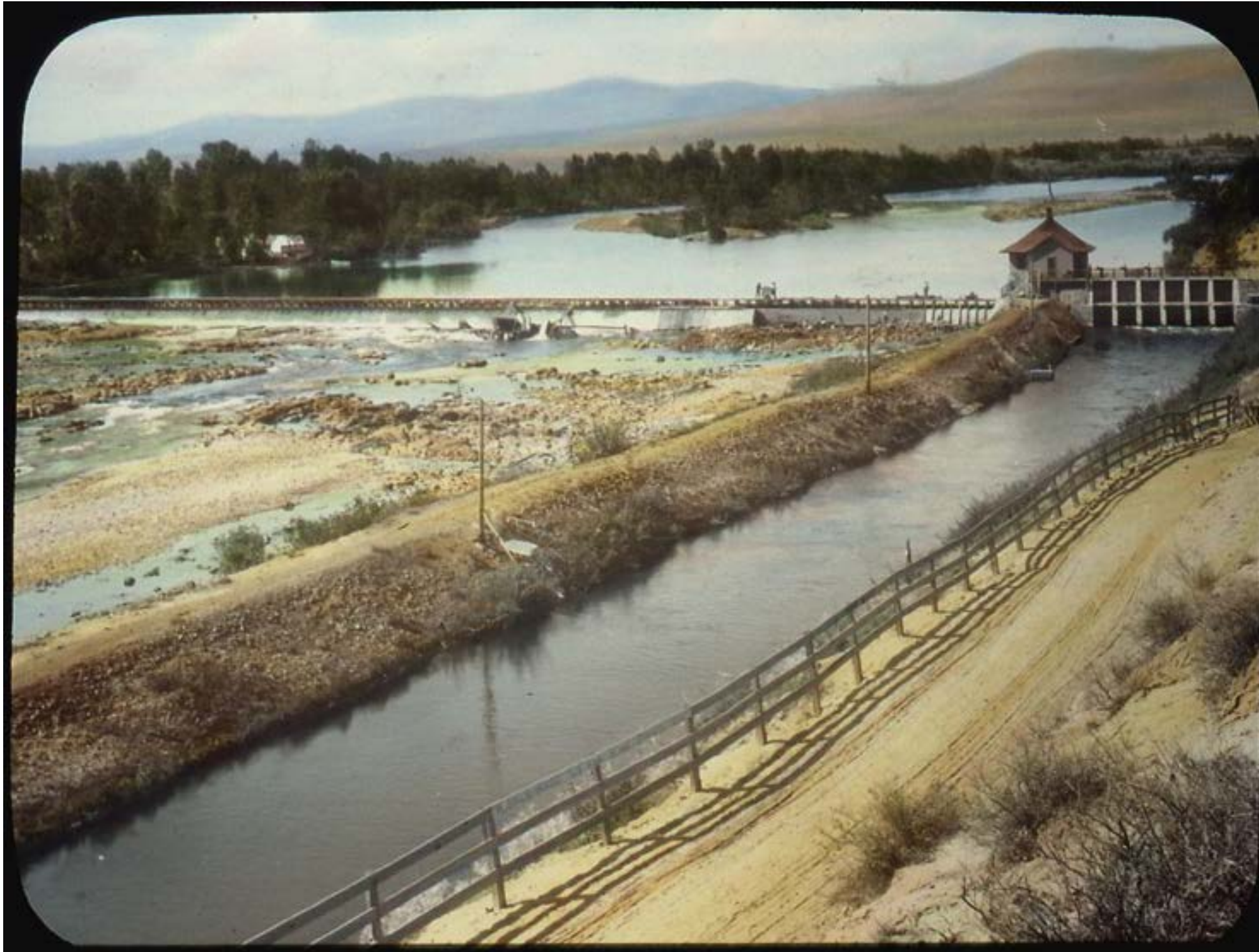
## US v. Washington (1974)

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**



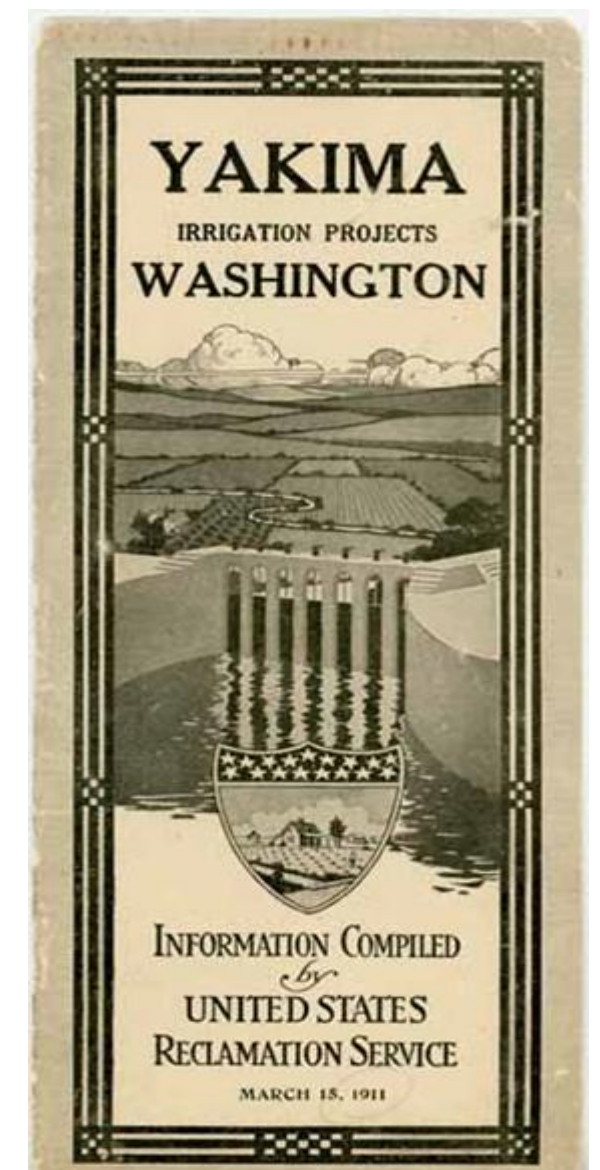
# Water in the Yakima River Basin



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)

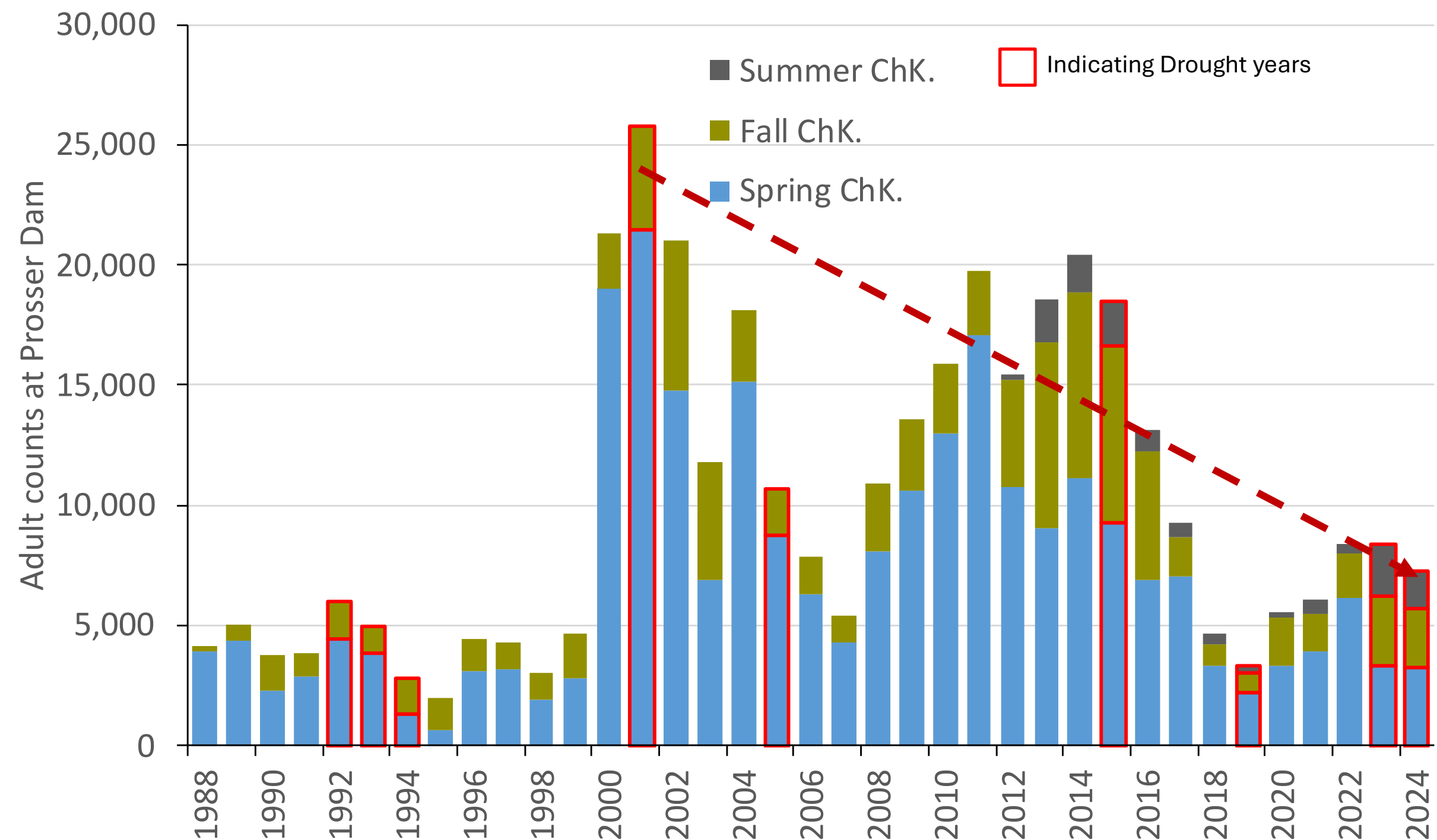


**Left:** Bumping Crib Dam (~1905)



# Fisheries Drought Impacts

Adult Counts at Prosser Dam



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



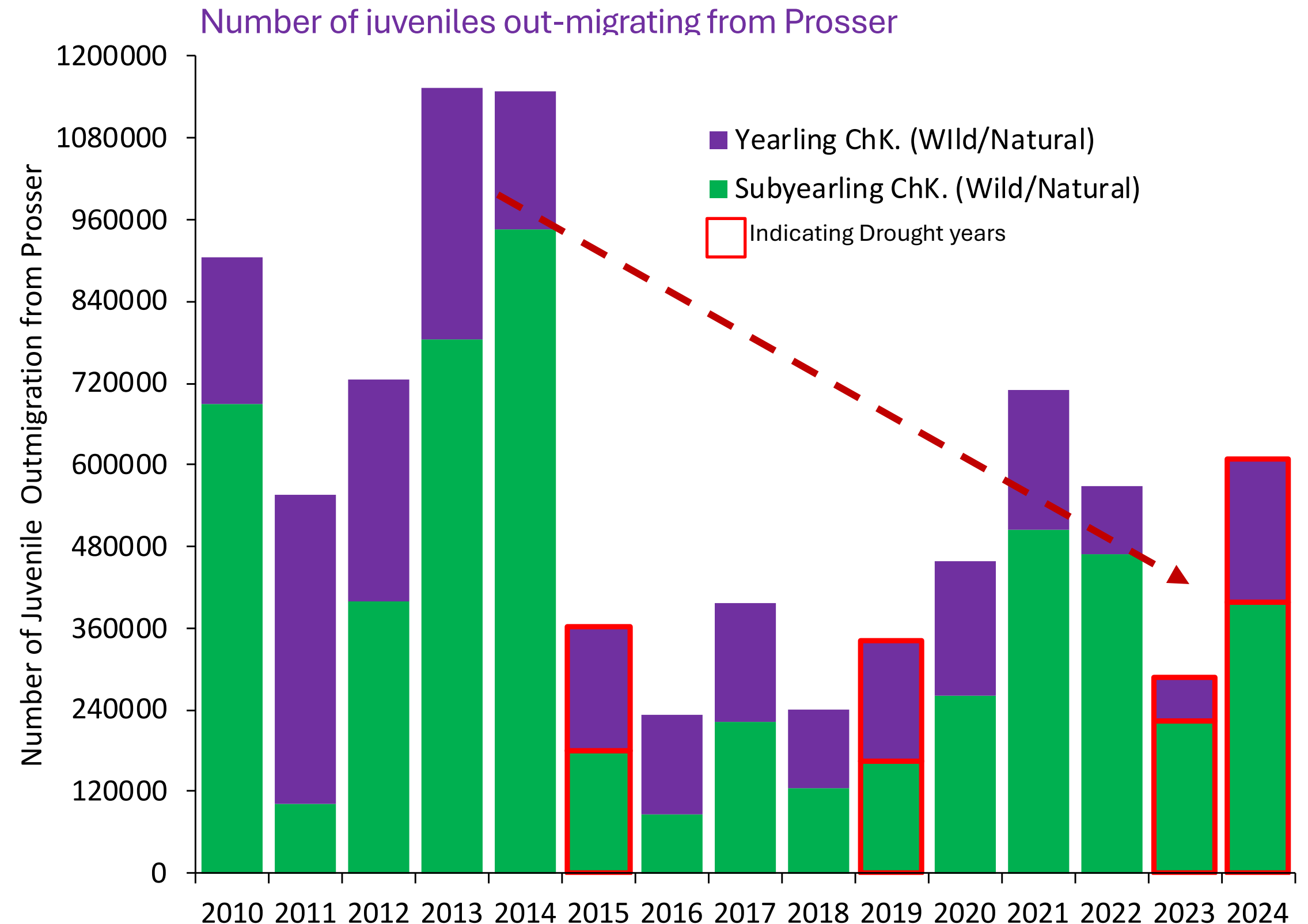
2024 Yakima River Fish Kill at the Yakima River Delta  
85 fish observed at surface  
Likely more than 700 fish



# 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

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Photo Credit: Wenatchee World



# **POM POM RM<sub>40</sub> RESTORATION PROJECT TOPPENISH CREEK**

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**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)

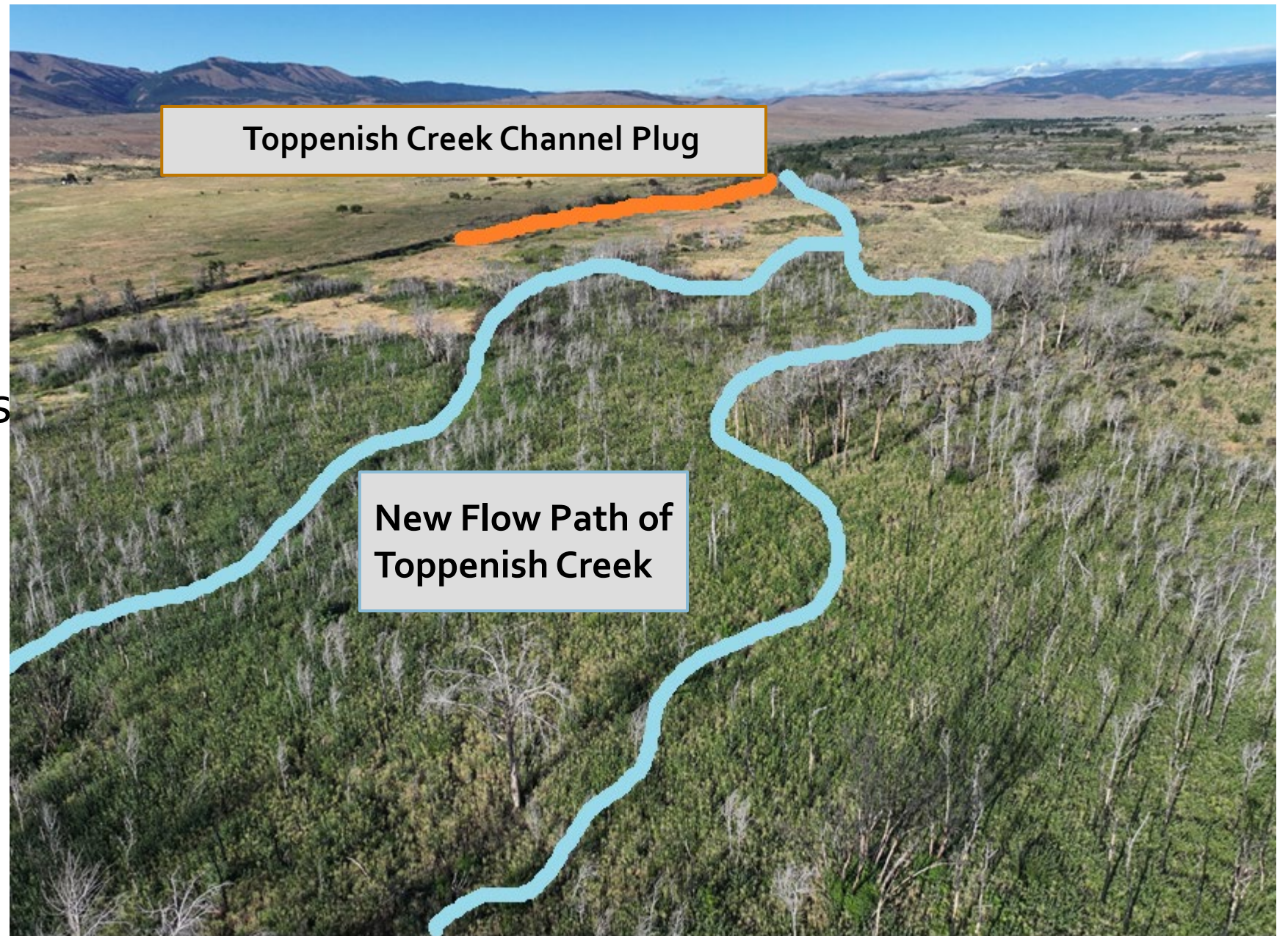




## Phase 2 "Restoration"

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







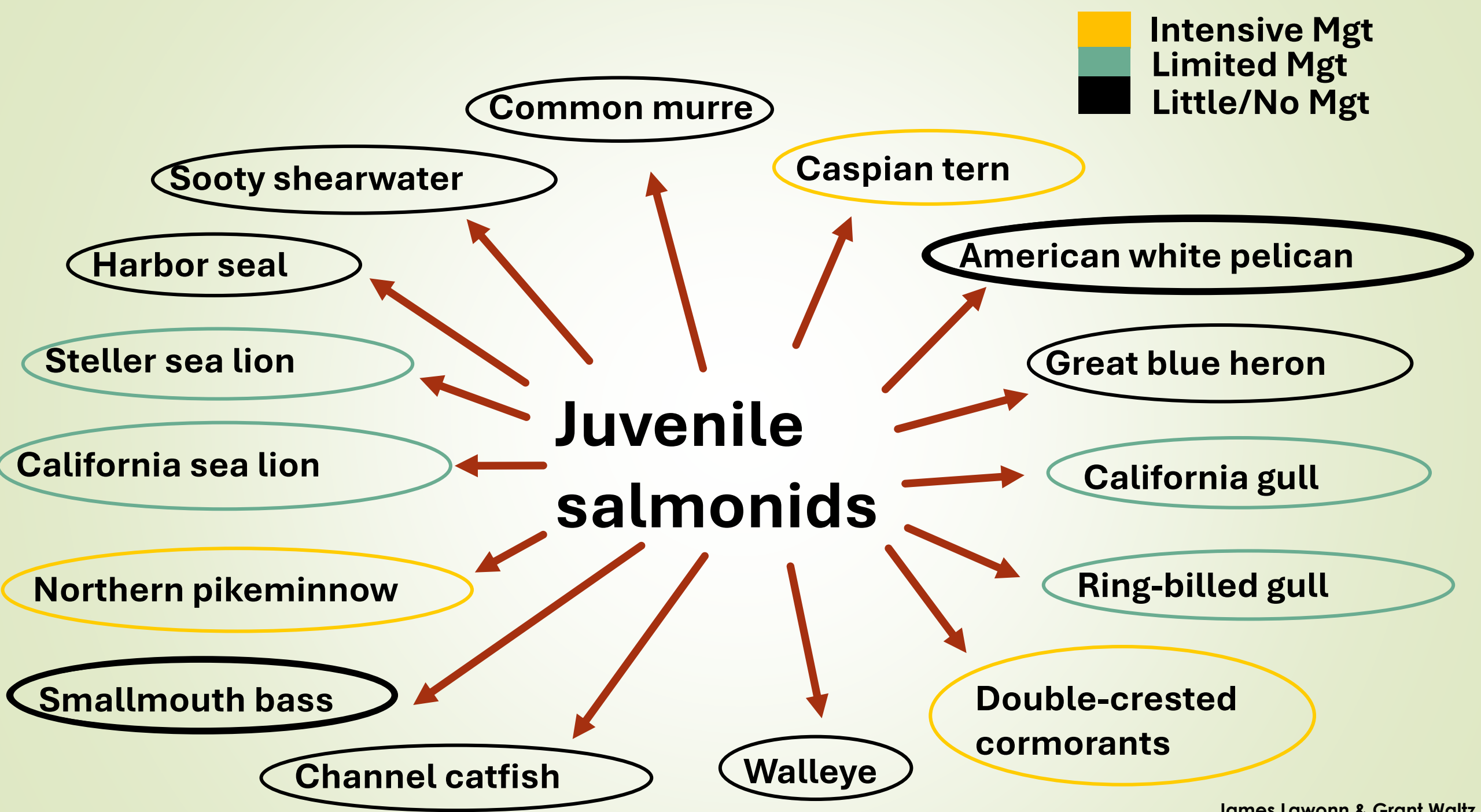


# Yakima River Fish & Avian Predation



Trenton De Boer – YNF  
Shelley Johnson – USGS



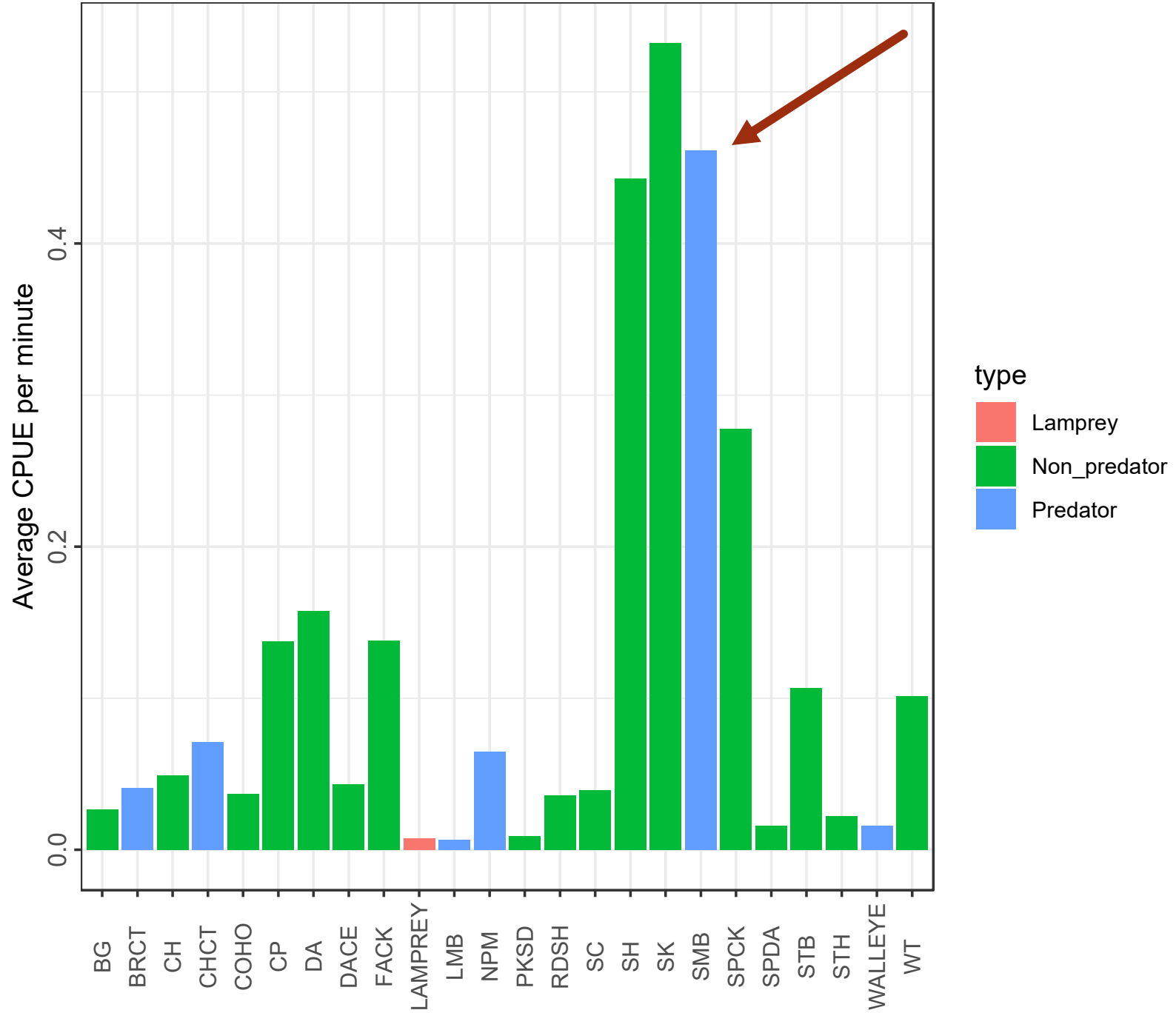






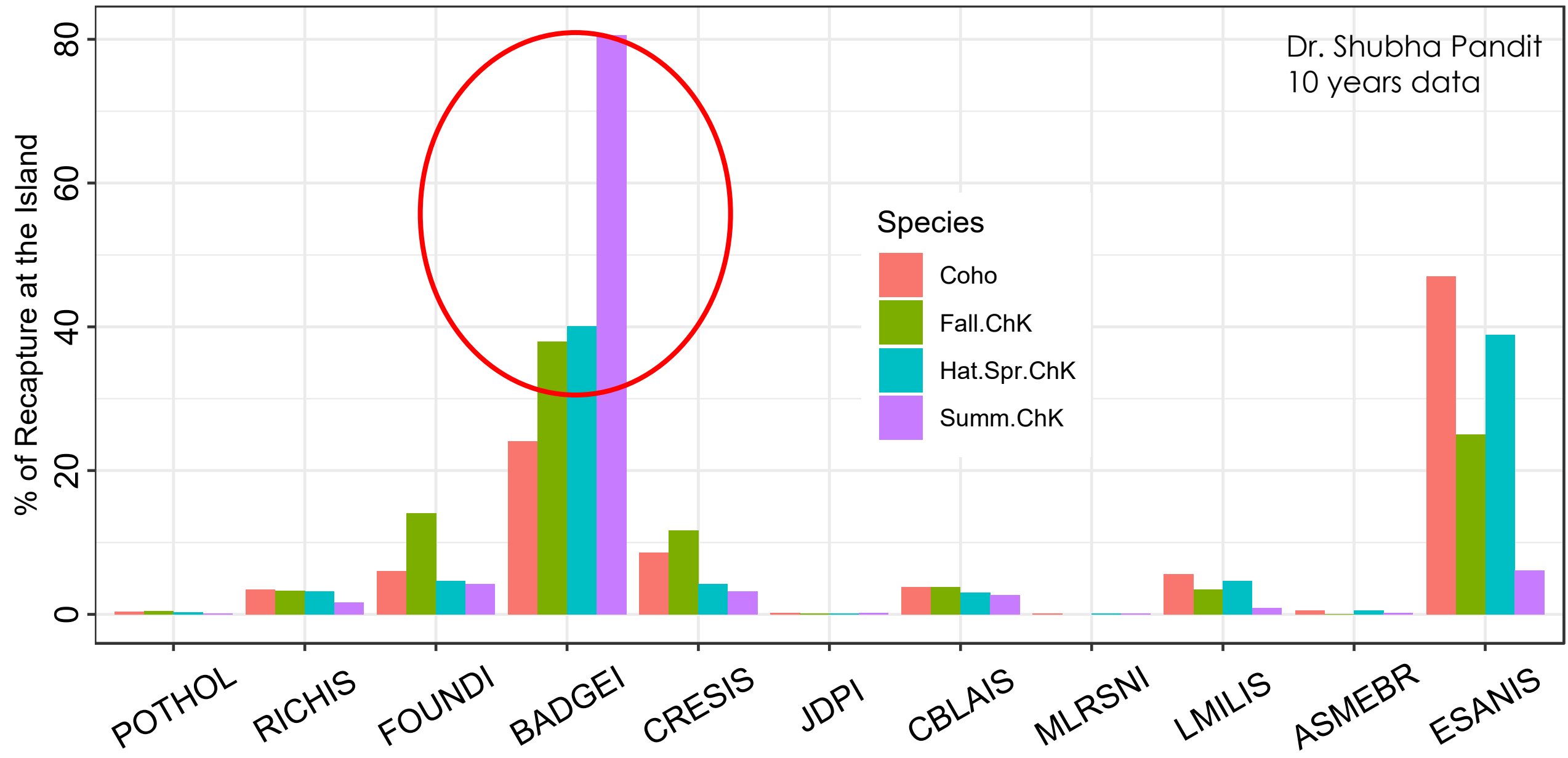
*Duane Raver - USFWS*



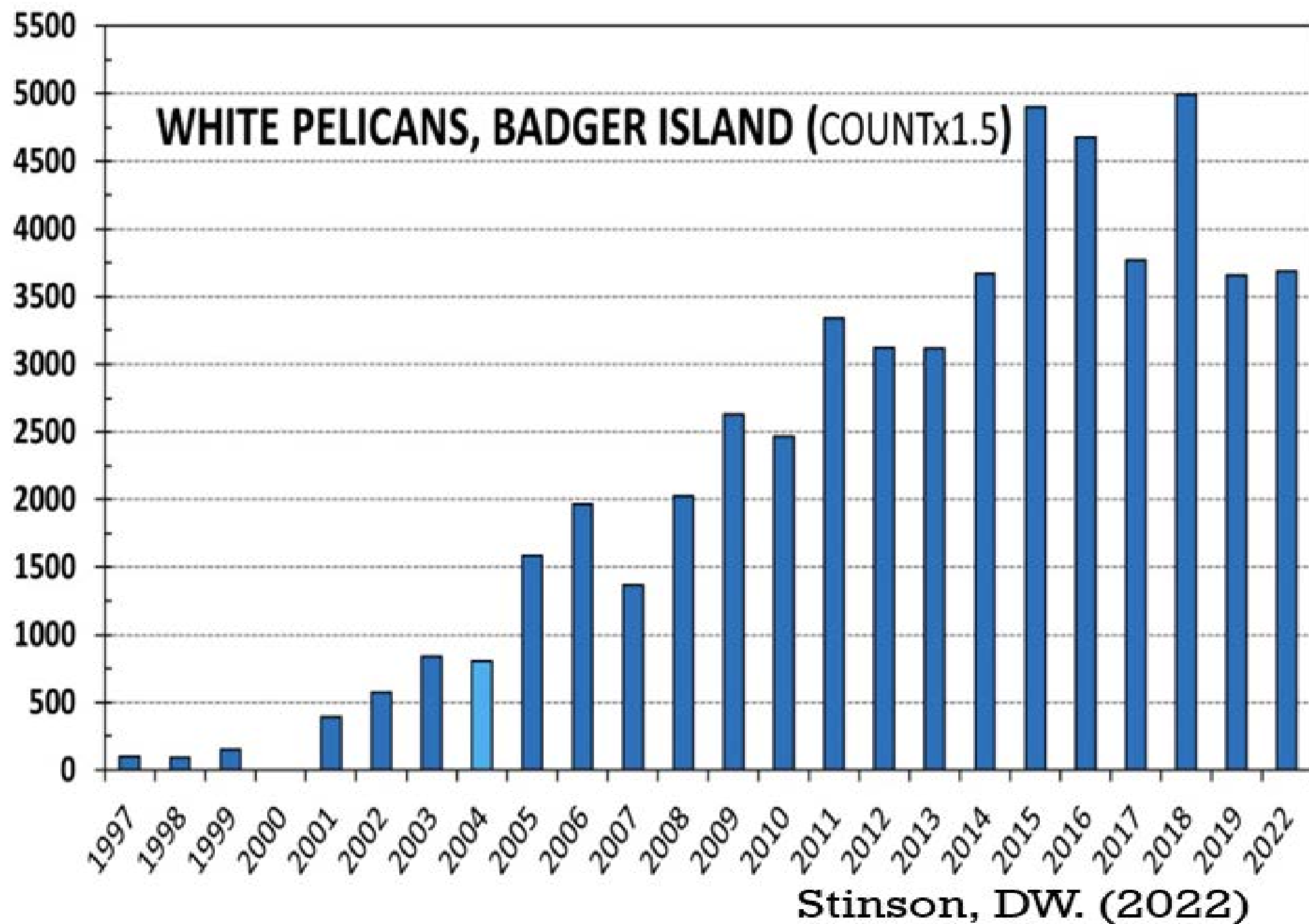




Dr. Shubha Pandit  
10 years data









# 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





# Cultural Importance of Lower Yakima River

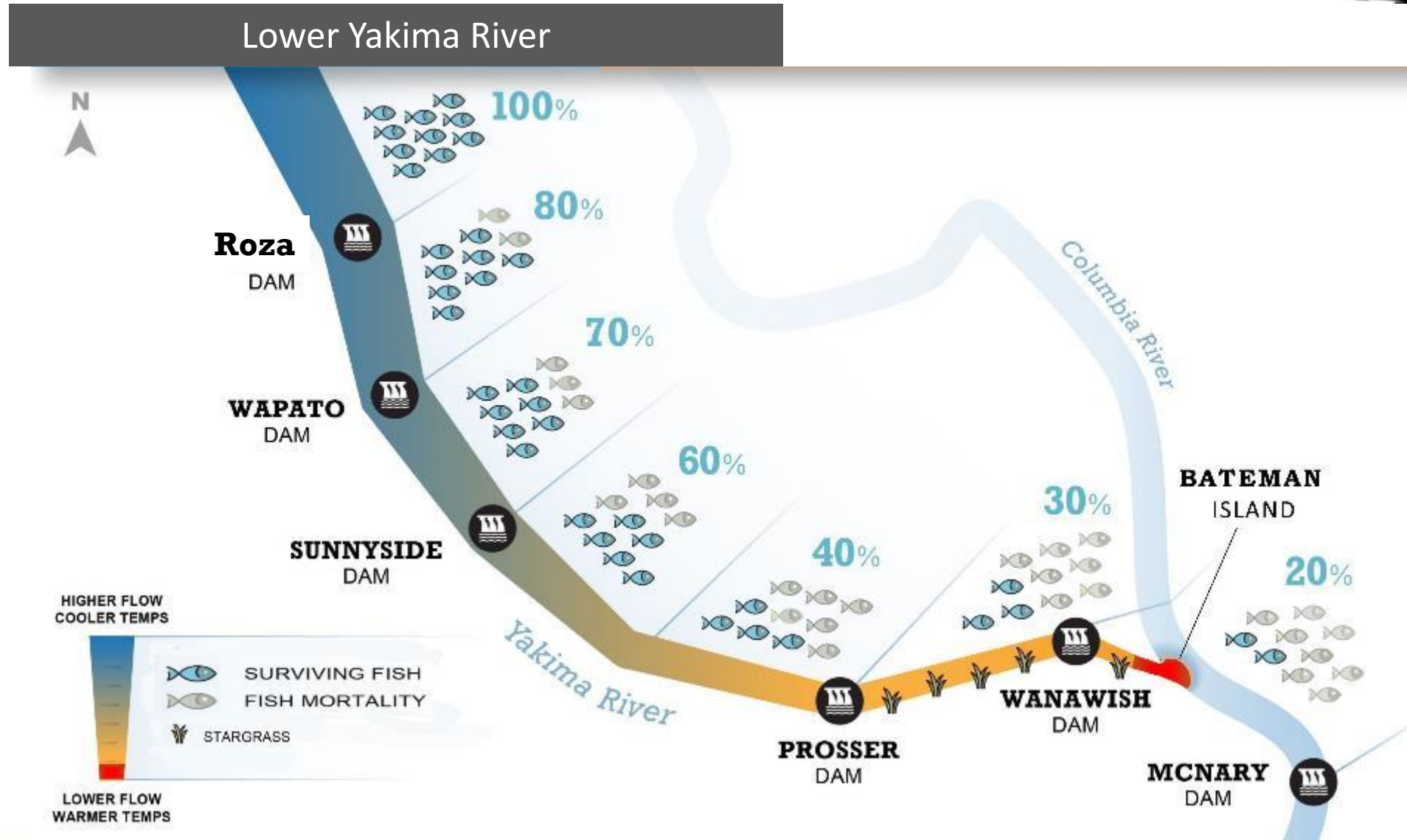


- Regionally significant fisheries at Top Tut (Prosser), natural falls created harvest opportunity
- Large villages and population at Parker
- Utilization since time immemorial continues to this day





# 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



Andrew Matala



# 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



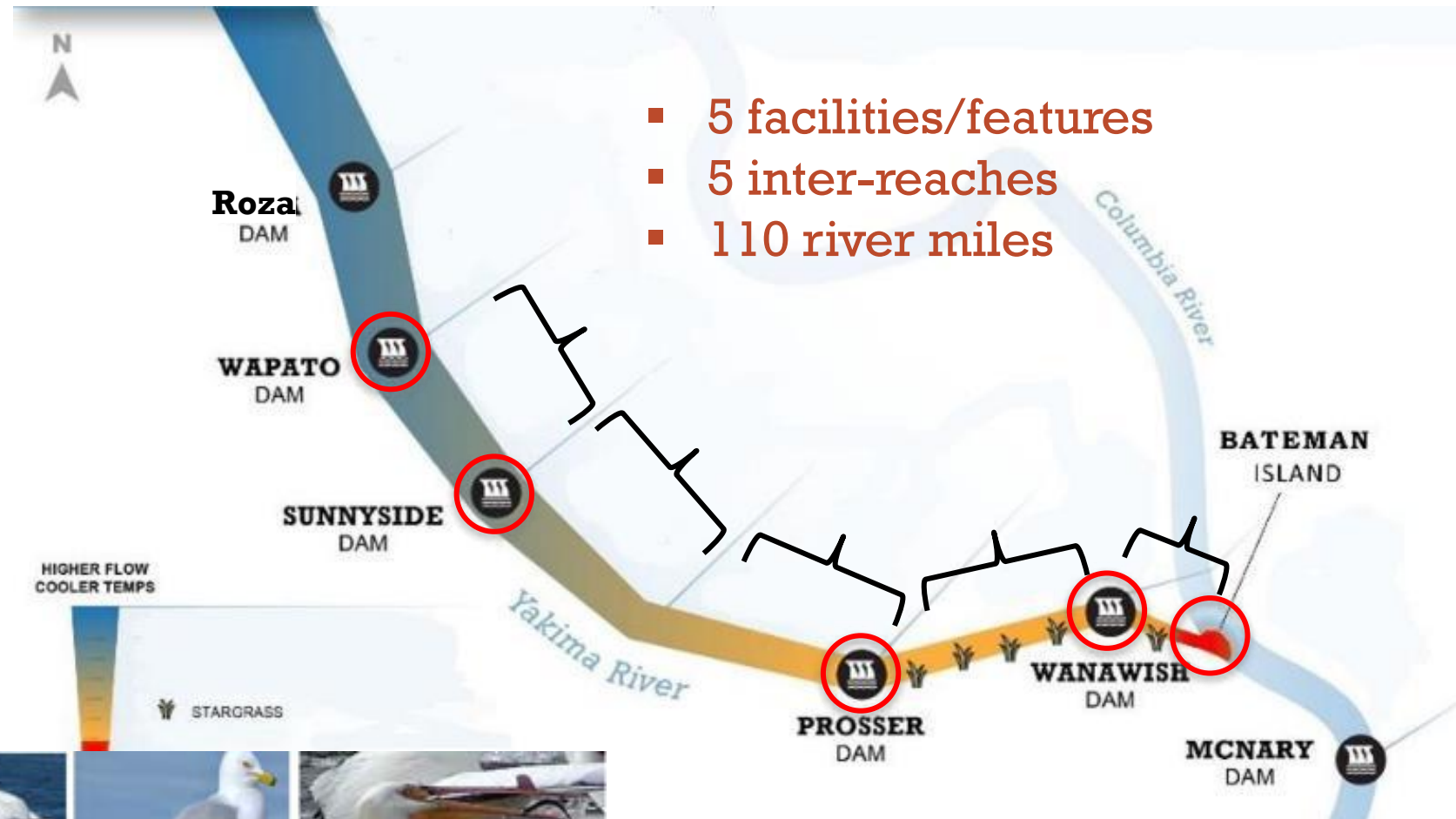


# Need for integrated, whole system approach-partnerships will be key



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

- 5 facilities/features
- 5 inter-reaches
- 110 river miles





## Improving Passage Barriers in the Yakima River Basin

### Legend

Yakima River Basin

#### Projects

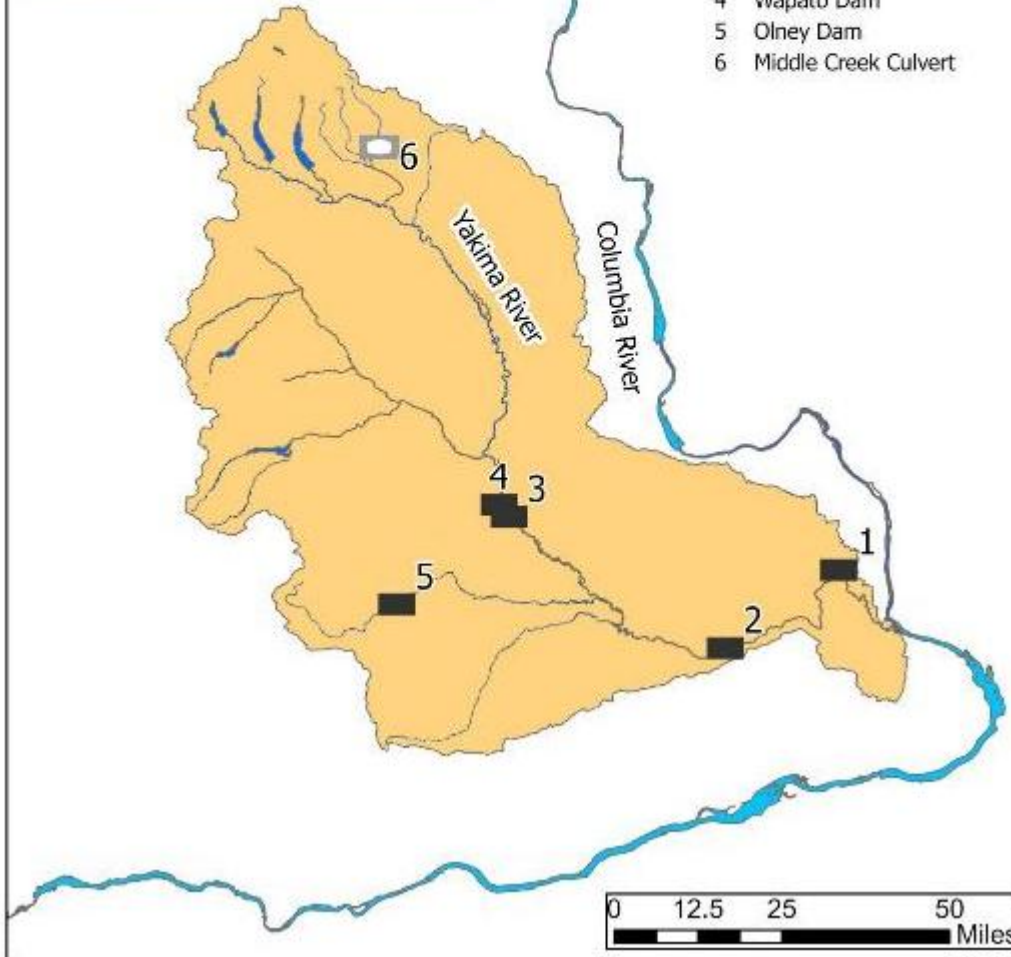
##### Type

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
- Wannawish Dam
- Bateman Island





# Prosser Dam and Diversion

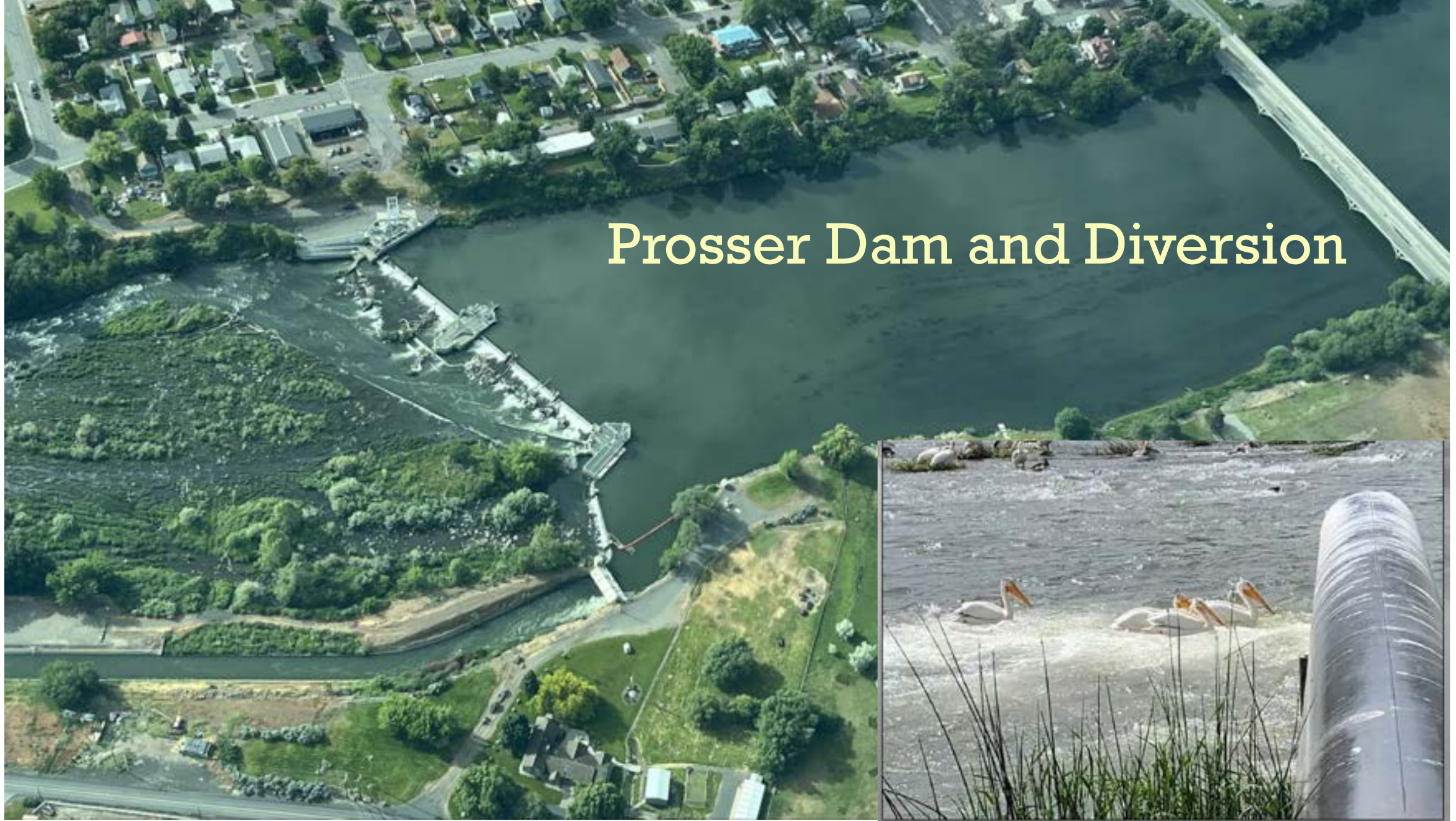






Photo Courtesy Pat Monk,





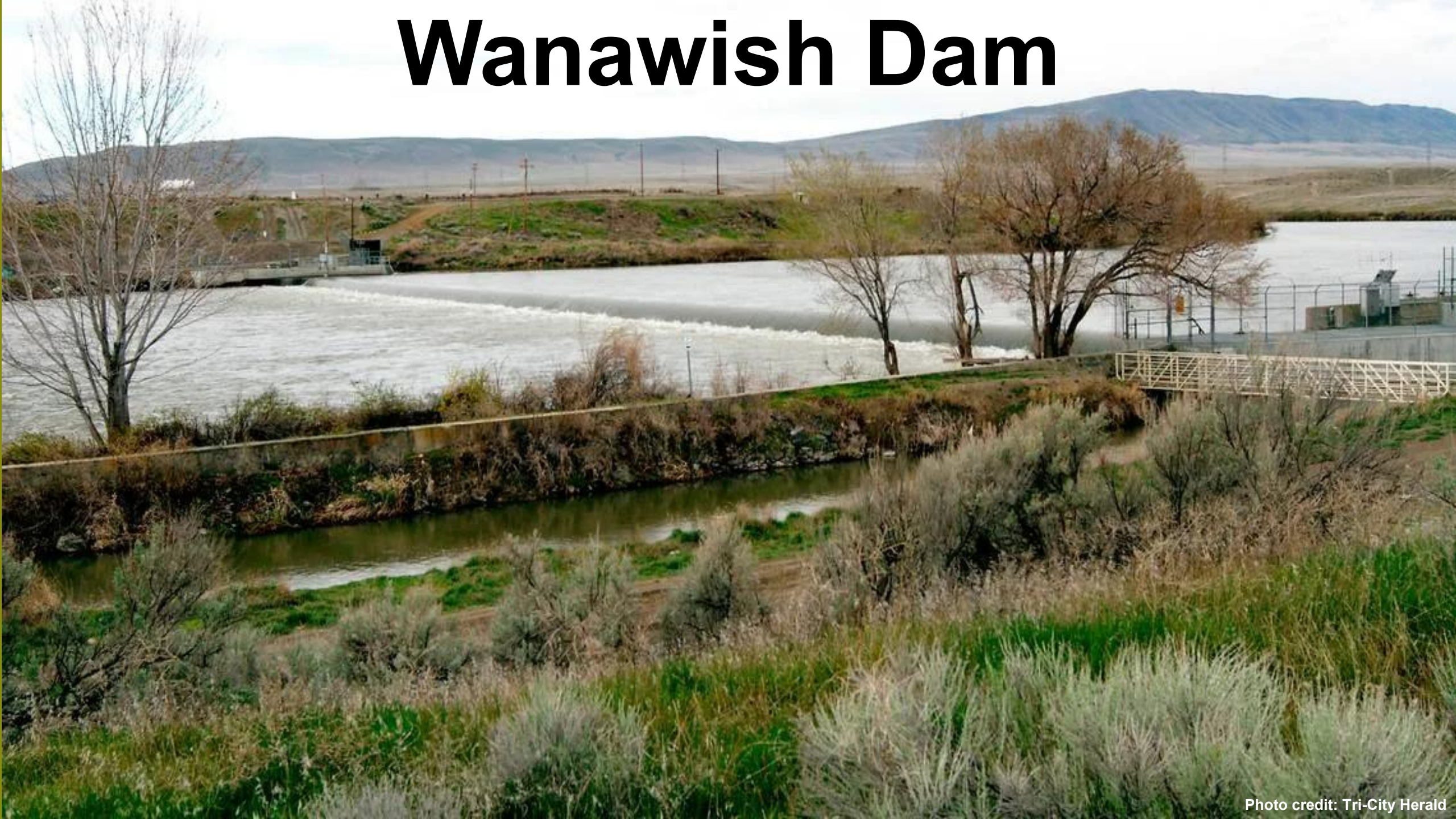
# Wapato Dam and Diversion



- 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



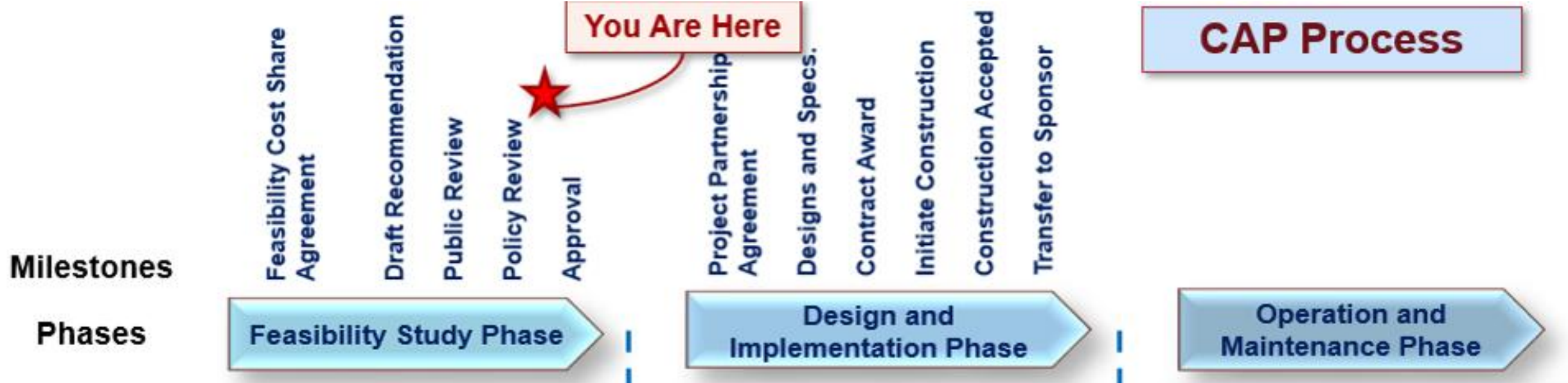
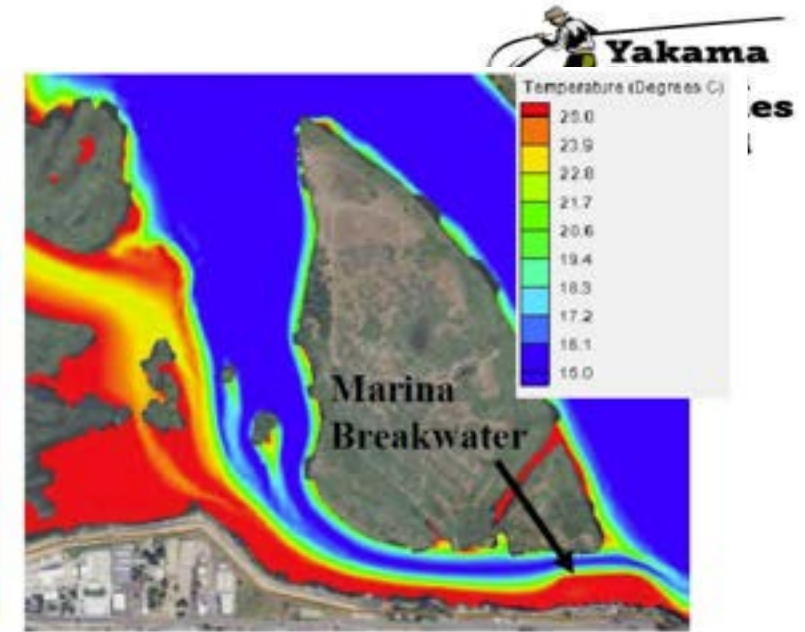
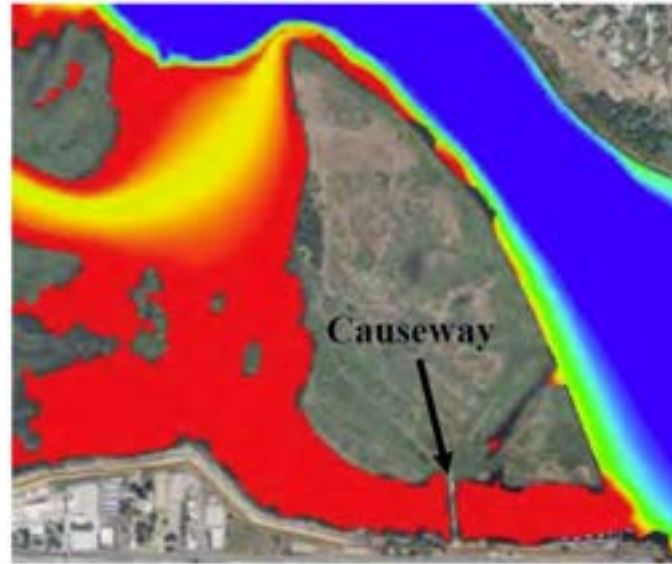






# Bateman Island

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





# Smolt Survival





# 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:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive drought year.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.



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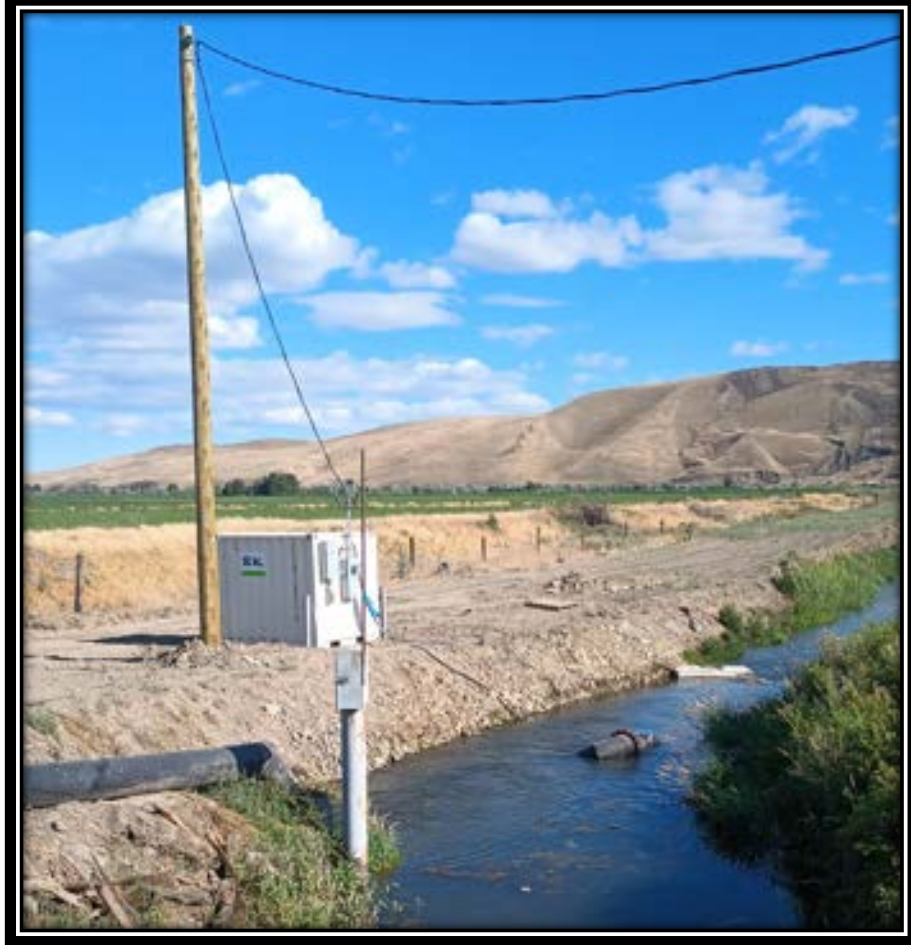
# 2025 Drought Impacts Wapato Irrigation Project Yakama Nation



# 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

Graysen Squeochs, P.E.  
YNE – Program Manager  
Graysen\_Squeochs@yakama.com  
509-865-5121 x6733





# 2025 Drought

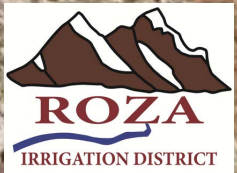
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SAGE PARK  
POLICY DIRECTOR  
ROZA IRRIGATION DISTRICT  
[SPARK@ROZA.ORG](mailto:SPARK@ROZA.ORG)  
509-840-1584





# Empty Canal in May 2025





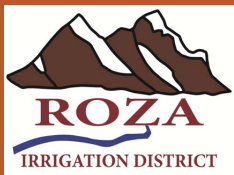
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**Roza Canal  
during shut  
down during  
May 2025.**





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





# Pump back recovery of water

























