

**DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE AND
REQUEST FOR COMMENT ON SCOPE OF
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
YAKIMA BASIN WATER STORAGE FEASIBILITY STUDY**

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) and the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), are requesting comments regarding the scope of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Yakima River Basin Water Storage Feasibility Study. The EIS will be a combined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) document. The EIS will fulfill and be consistent with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations. A Notice of Intent to prepare a Combined Planning Report and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be published in the Federal Register on December 29, 2006.

Description of Proposal: The purpose of the Storage Study is to evaluate alternatives that would create additional water storage for the Yakima River Basin and assess their potential to supply the water needed for aquatic ecosystem habitat, basin-wide agriculture, and municipal demands. For more information, visit the Storage Study website at: http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/storage_study/index.html.

Proponent: The project proponents are the Washington State Department of Ecology and the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation.

Location of Proposal: The project area is the Yakima River Basin in Benton, Yakima, and Kittitas Counties, Washington and encompasses Water Resources Inventory Areas 37, 38 and 39. In addition, one of the alternatives under consideration would involve diversion of water from the Columbia River mainstem.

Lead and Cooperating Agencies: Ecology is a joint lead agency with Reclamation in the preparation of this Environmental Impact Statement.

EIS Required. The lead agencies have determined this proposal is likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment. An environmental impact statement (EIS) is required under RCW 43.21C.030 (2)(c) and will be prepared.

Possible Alternatives: The alternatives being investigated by Reclamation include additional storage of Yakima River water in a proposed reservoir at Wymer, as well as water exchanges with the Columbia River as part of the Black Rock reservoir proposal. In addition, consistent with the provisions of SEPA, Ecology will evaluate a range of alternatives that include both storage, the subject of the Yakima River Basin Water Storage Feasibility Study, and non-storage components. As a result, the jointly prepared EIS will provide NEPA coverage for storage alternatives that Reclamation may consider as part of the Yakima River Basin Water Storage Feasibility Study as well as SEPA coverage for a broader range of alternatives that Ecology may consider.

Preliminary Issues: Among the major issues to be considered are effects on water quality and quantity, fish and wildlife habitat impacts, plant communities, air quality, transportation, cultural resources, and scenic resources aesthetics, as well as social/economic impacts.

Scoping: Agencies, affected tribes, organizations, and members of the public are invited to comment on the scope of the EIS. You may comment on alternatives, mitigation measures, probable significant adverse impacts, and licenses or other approvals that may be required. The comment period will open on December 29, 2006, and close on January 31, 2007.

Reclamation and Ecology will host two open houses and public scoping meetings. The scoping meetings will be preceded by informal open houses and will be held at the Yakima Convention Center, 10 North 8th Street, in Yakima, Washington, on January 23, 2007. The schedule for the open houses and meetings is as follows:

Open Houses: 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Scoping Meetings: 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Reclamation and Ecology have identified a single point of contact for receiving written comments on the scope of the SEIS. Comments may be submitted in writing to:

Bureau of Reclamation, Upper Columbia Area Office, Attention: David Kaumheimer, Environmental Programs Manager, 1917 Marsh Road, Yakima, Washington 98901-2058. Comments may also be submitted electronically to storagestudy@pn.usbr.gov

SEPA Responsible Official: Derek I. Sandison
Position/title: Central Regional Director, Washington State Department of Ecology
Date: December 29, 2006

Signature: 