

What Is the Difference Between a Programmatic and a Project-Level Environmental Impact Statement?

Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan

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There are two types of environmental impact statements—“programmatic” and “project-level.” These are also sometimes referred to as “planning-level” and “site-specific” based on differences in their focus and level of detail.

In March 2012, a Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) was released for the entire Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan (Integrated Plan).

A *programmatic* environmental impact statement (PEIS) evaluates the effects of broad proposals or planning-level decisions that may include any or all of the following:

- A wide range of individual projects;
- Implementation over a long timeframe; and/or
- Implementation across a large geographic area.

The level of detail in a PEIS is sufficient to allow informed choice among planning-level alternatives and to develop broad mitigation strategies. Collaboration among Federal, State, and local agencies and Tribes is especially important in a PEIS process.

The PEIS does not evaluate project-level issues such as precise project footprints or specific design details that are not yet ready for decision at the planning level. Instead, a PEIS is an excellent means for examining the interaction among proposed projects or plan elements, and for assessing cumulative effects. Like a project-level EIS, a PEIS also includes a “no action alternative.”

Typically, a PEIS is followed by subsequent project-level environmental reviews in the form of an EIS, Environmental Assessment, or Categorical Exclusion Checklist, for specific components of the proposal. When a project-level environmental review is undertaken for a specific component, the stepwise approach to analyses and decisionmaking is called “tiering.”

<http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/eis/kdrpp/index.html>

<http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/eis/kkc/index.html>

<http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/eis/cleelumraise/index.html>

<http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/yrbwep/2011integratedplan/index.html>

The EISs being prepared for the Cle Elum Pool Raise and Keechelus-to-Kachess Conveyance and Kachess Drought Relief Pumping Plant (Kachess Inactive Storage) are *project-level*, and will *tier* off the Integrated Plan PEIS. These project-level EISs will analyze a narrower proposal related to the initial broad (*programmatic*) proposal identified in the Integrated Plan PEIS.

The intent of the tiering concept is to encourage elimination of repetitive discussions and to focus on the actual issues ready for decisions at each level of environmental review. Tiering expedites the resolution of big-picture issues so that subsequent studies can focus on project-specific impacts and issues. Those big-picture issues and analyses do not have to be repeated in subsequent tiered environmental reviews, but can simply be referenced from the programmatic document. Tiering also allows environmental analyses for each Tier 2 project to be conducted closer in time to the actual construction phase, or as funds become available for construction.

Tiering expands the opportunities for public and agency input by breaking the environmental analyses into two levels. Individuals with an interest in the overarching big-picture questions have had an opportunity to participate at the programmatic level (Tier 1), and those who are interested in localized impact and mitigation issues can focus their efforts on the current specific project-level (Tier 2) project or projects.