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Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project (YRBWEP) Meeting Notes June 30, 2009

The Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project 2009 Work Group (hereafter called the YRBWEP Work Group) held its initial meeting on June 30, 2009. Welcoming remarks were made by Dan Newhouse, State Director of Agriculture; Bill McDonald, Regional Director of the Bureau of Reclamation; Jay Manning, Director of Ecology; Jamie Shimek, assistant to Senator Patty Murray; Barb Lisk, assistant to Congressman Doc Hastings; and Dave Reeploeg, assistant to Senator Maria Cantwell. These welcoming remarks emphasized that this was a time for action in the Yakima Basin. There is a need for local interests to come together to support an approach in common. Competition for Federal appropriates is intense and support from the local community is key to success in that competition.

Members of the YRBWEP Work Group shared their initial perspectives on the prospects for the group. Various speakers recognized a shift in attitudes in the basin in recent years and the development of improved working relationships. Significant leadership has been evident in recent years. This has created a renewed sense of opportunity for a comprehensive approach to water projects in the basin.

Wendy Christensen and Jerry Kelso of Reclamation and Derek Sandison of Ecology reviewed a series of events that led to the creation of the YRBWEP Work Group. The Group emerges from the previous work on the YRBWEP, initially enacted into law in December 1979. Most recently, Ecology and Reclamation completed a Draft Planning Report/Environmental Impact Statement (PR/EIS) in January 2008. Reclamation completed its Final PR/EIS in December 2008 and issued a Concluding Letter in April 2009 and, prompted by comments received, Ecology then completed a Final Supplemental EIS in June 2009. The two agencies concluded that no additional studies were needed, and that it was now essential to bring together a group of interests most directly affected by current conditions in the basin. The agencies are seeking a consensus on a comprehensive set of projects that collectively address water supply, habitat, and fish passage, and then incorporate these projects into an implementation plan.

An Executive Committee was formed consisting of Dale Bambrick (NOAA), Mike Leita (Yakima County), Phil Rigdon (Yakama Nation), Derek Sandison (Ecology), Ron Van Gundy (Roza Irrigation District), and Dawn Wiedmeier (Reclamation). The Executive Committee will decide on meeting logistics and schedule, prepare agendas, and generally assist the process for reaching a decision or set of decisions.

The YRBWEP Work Group scheduled the next two full-day meetings for July 15 and July 29 at the Yakima Arboretum in Yakima. They agreed that those two meetings would focus on reviewing data gathered to date to help ensure that all members are starting with a similar information base.

The YRBWEP Work Group seeks to reach a consensus in the next 6-9 months.



Members in attendance:

Brad Avy, Washington Department of Agriculture
Dale Bambrick, NOAA Fisheries Service
Max Benitz, Benton County Commission
Alex Conley, Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board
Rick Dieker, Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District
Michael Garrity, American Rivers
Ken Hasbrouck, Kittitas Reclamation District
Urban Eberhart, Kittitas Reclamation District
Mike Leita, Yakima County Commission
Bill Lover, City of Yakima
Mark McClain, Kittitas County
Sid Morrison, Yakima Basin Storage Alliance
Scott Revell, Kennewick Irrigation District
Phil Rigdon, Yakama Nation - Natural Resources
Derek Sandison, Washington Department of Ecology
Jeff Tayer, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Jeff Thomas, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Jim Trull, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District
Ron VanGundy, Roza Irrigation District
Dawn Wiedmeier, Bureau of Reclamation

Members absent:

Dave Fast, Yakama Nation – Yakima/Klickitat Fisheries Project