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Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project (YRBWEP) 2009 Workgroup Meeting Notes July 15, 2009

The meeting was an overview of demand projections described in Reclamation's Yakima River Basin Water Storage Study Feasibility Study (Storage Study) and four subject areas from Ecology's Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Alternative EIS.

Demand

Wendy Christensen from Reclamation provided a handout of data on water demand estimates for instream flow, irrigation entitlements, and municipal demand. The instream flow data included flow and volume objectives in five reaches as well as a detailed flow priority matrix based on a December 2006 meeting with Yakima Basin biologists. A focus of the irrigation data was the difference between the entitlement and what districts have calculated that they would need in a dry year. There was a request for more information on how the districts arrived at the figures on which they have settled. For the municipal data, there were questions on the extent to which conservation had been factored into demand. The data will need to be verified.

Conservation

Walt Larrick described Reclamation's irrigation-related conservation activities over the last 20 years. The Federal Government has funded 65% of this conservation; the State and districts 17 ½ % each. Walt reviewed data on conserved water and cost per acre foot for two Sunnyside projects and a Benton project. Reclamation has developed a conservation program for the tributaries which it is implementing in concert with 8 irrigation districts. Up to 150,000 af may be available from this program. The Wapato District is unique and has separate guidelines for its Satus project. The State and individual districts have their own conservation programs, beyond what are offered by Reclamation.

Derek Sandison described Ecology's Enhanced Water Conservation focus. The conclusion from its review is that conservation benefits accrue to instream flow but conservation tends to be less effective supplying out-of-stream use.

Bob Montgomery of Anchor Environmental addressed the question of "what is a reasonable amount of water available from conservation?" Previously identified YRBWEP projects could yield as much as 157,200 af of water. The Enhanced Water Conservation Model identified additional potential conserved water, up to 229,200 af in all, at a cost of \$406 million. There are significant questions in how this water could be shaped, and what limitations there are on its use.



At this juncture, public comment was taken. David Ortman of the Sierra Club read a statement criticizing the process, opposing several dam projects, and promoting the values of conservation. Stu Crane of the Yakama Nation described how on-farm conservation could intersect with other conservation efforts to be successful. Alec Maule of the USGS described potential climate change scenarios and future data availability.

New Storage

Wendy Christensen reviewed the results of Reclamation's December 2008 Storage Study Final Planning Report/EIS. Storage projects needed to meet three criteria: (1) not-less-than 70% availability in a drought for proratable irrigators, (2) improve anadromous fish habitat, and (3) meet future demands of municipalities. Reclamation looked at three alternatives: Black Rock, Wymer Dam and Reservoir, and Wymer Dam plus Yakima River Pump Exchange. Generally speaking, all three met the storage study goals but were not economically justified.

Bob Montgomery then reviewed information from Ecology's programmatic EIS, including the Bumping Lake Expansion, the Wymer Reservoir, and the Pine Hollow Reservoir. Workgroup members focused their comments on costs of each option and the effect of the Bumping option on bull trout and spotted owl.

Groundwater Storage

Phil Brown of Golder Associates described three alternatives for groundwater storage projects: surface recharge in alluvium, municipal aquifer storage, and basalt aquifer storage. Surface recharge has the highest volume of passive return flow to stream, but limited dry-year return flow and large land requirements and operational issues. Municipal aquifer storage has constraints with water treatment plant capacity and minimal impact on instream flow. Basalt aquifer storage depends on geologic conditions. The best option, due to its deep water levels, appears to be the Grand Ronde. A big question for the options that rely on direct injection is the antidegradation requirements of state law.

Structural and Operational Changes

Bob Montgomery reviewed four types of projects: operational changes to existing facilities, structural changes to existing facilities, the Kittitas Reclamation District canal modifications, and completion of the Wapatox project. Two operational changes would be subordinating the Roza Power Plant or the Chandler Power Plant to reduce or eliminate power diversions during smolt outmigration. Structural changes include moving the point of diversion for the Satus division of the Wapato Irrigation District; a KID pump exchange to increase flow in lower Yakima River; and diffuse predator concentration at a juvenile bypass outfall change at Chandler Fish Handling Facility.

At this point the Workgroup had a general discussion of where to go, once the overview briefing is completed on July 29. The Executive Committee will take up that subject at its next meeting.

Members in attendance:

Brad Avy, Washington Department of Agriculture
Max Benitz, Benton County Commission
Alex Conley, Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board
Jim Milton, Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District (alt.)

Michael Garrity, American Rivers
Urban Eberhart, Kittitas Reclamation District
Dave Fast, Yakama Nation – Yakima/Klickitat Fisheries Project
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
Ron VanGundy, Roza Irrigation District
Dawn Wiedmeier, Bureau of Reclamation

Members absent:

Dale Bambrick, NOAA Fisheries Service
Jim Trull, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District