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Board of County Commissioners BENTON COUNTY

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November 16, 2009

YRBWEP 2009 Work Group
% Ben Floyd, HDR, Incorporated
2805 Saint Andrews Loop, Suite A
Pasco, Washington 99301-6121

Re: Benton County's Assessment of the "Seven Elements"

Dear Work Group Members:

Benton County appreciates the opportunity to participate in the Work Group as we work toward an "Integrated Package" of goals, projects, and system modifications as part of the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project legislative renewal ("YRBWEP III"). The committed participation of all of the stakeholders, the aggressive and consistent schedule, and the excellent facilitation has helped all parties to stay focused and move the project along.

At this point in the process, Benton County would like to offer general input on the direction and content of this process. We are providing that input below, categorized by the "Seven Elements" that were defined in the *Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Alternative Final Environmental Impact Statement*:

- New or expanded surface storage reservoirs and water transfer...
 - *It is clear that the storage capacity provided 70 years ago is not going to be adequate to meet future needs. "YRBWEP III" must be clear and proactive in addressing this element head-on. The Work Group cannot nibble conservatively at the margins. A robust position on new and expanded storage is needed in the new legislation, and that legislation needs to address the three "guiding goals" presented by the Bureau of Reclamation in its water storage feasibility study and EIS. The goals are 1) meeting the instream flow needs for fisheries, 2) meeting municipal needs for 2050 population projections, and 3) meeting the 70% delivery target for proratable (junior) users in "dry years". To accomplish these goals, we believe that a target (of between 800,000 and 1.3 million acre-feet) of new storage is needed in conjunction with a Columbia River Pump Exchange, and YRBWEP III needs to provide a path to this target legislatively. As we have stated previously, recreational and power generation values also need to be considered with evaluating expanded storage options.*

- Fish passage at existing reservoirs...
 - *The County supports opening upper basin habitat through viable passage improvements at existing water storage reservoirs, provided that new or expanded storage capacity goals are also accomplished concurrently.*
- Structural and operational changes to existing facilities...
 - *The County generally supports the various opportunities that have been discussed, but emphasizes the need for screening of the projects as to accomplishments and cost effectiveness.*
- Groundwater storage...
 - *The County is supportive of the concepts being considered by the Work Group, including both active storage and retrieval, as well as passive storage using infiltration where appropriate.*
- Fish habitat enhancements on the mainstem and tributaries...
 - *The County supports habitat enhancements throughout the Basin that are proportional to work toward the other six elements. "Throughout" means not just enhancements to remote alpine streams, but also meaningful work on the lower river where more fish spend more time.*
- Water conservation...
 - *The County supports continued conservation measures that demonstrate meaningful water savings via proportional resource investment ("bang for the buck").*
- Water marketing / Water banking...
 - *The County supports the market-based resource allocation concepts that have been discussed by the Work Group to date.*

Finally, the "phasing" approach being considered by the Work Group (whereby a third phase of projects would not even begin for at least 26 years) does continue to cause us concern. We believe that an aggressive approach to implementation is needed for these projects.

Again, Benton County continues to appreciate the hard work and obvious commitment of the Work Group. We have accomplished a lot this year already, and the County looks forward to completion of a robust and comprehensive legislative package in 2010.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



Max E. Benitz, Jr., Chairman

A copy of the foregoing letter was sent to the following individuals:

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