August 25, 2010 Proposed Action for Agricultural Water Conservation Program
Yakima River Basin Study/Integrated Plan (Task 4-12)

The Out-of-Stream Water Needs Subcommittee of the YRBWEP Workgroup recommends the following to comprise the Agricultural Water Conservation Program element of the Integrated Water Resources Management Plan.

Description

Include in the Integrated Plan and seek funding for an aggressive program of agricultural water conservation measures with an approximate cost of $375 million. The agricultural water conservation program includes measures beyond those likely to be implemented in the existing YRBWEP Phase II conservation program.

Agricultural water conservation measures that could be implemented under this program include:

- Lining or piping existing canals or laterals
- Constructing reregulation reservoirs on irrigation canals
- Installing gates and automation on irrigation canals
- Improving water measurement and accounting systems
- Installing higher efficiency sprinkler systems
- Implementing irrigation water management practices and other measures to reduce seepage, evaporation and operational spills

Specific projects are not provided as part of this recommendation. Projects to be implemented will be selected through detailed feasibility studies and evaluation by the existing Conservation Advisory Group (CAG). Representative projects were presented at the July 28th Out of Stream Subcommittee meeting and have been previously presented as the Enhanced Water Conservation Alternative[1].

Benefits

Water savings will be realized based upon actual projects implemented. This program will reduce water supply requirements for individual irrigation districts and increase instream flows in river reaches by reducing diversions. Water savings are not cumulative because water conservation projects reduce the amount of return flow to surface water. That return flow is a source of supply for downstream water users. Water savings will be greater in years (e.g., 170,000 acre-feet) when water users have a full water supply. In drought years, the water savings will be greatly reduced as a greater percentage of water diverted is consumptively used.

[1] This alternative is described in the June 2009 Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Yakima River Basin Water Resource Management Alternative, and the Ecology December 2007 Technical Report on the Enhanced Water Conservation Alternative for the Yakima River Basin Water Storage Feasibility Study.