

Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan
Operating Guidelines Group
Draft Charter and Mission Statement
(Revision 2, updated per 5/29/2013 meeting)

Introduction

Reclamation has been meeting with a group comprised of irrigation districts, Ecology, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Yakama Nation staff, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, City of Yakima, Yakima County, American Rivers and National Wildlife Federation to discuss potential guidelines for future operations of the Yakima Project if the proposed Integrated Plan (IP) is implemented. Although progress has been made on developing draft guidelines, additional clarification is needed on the objectives and desired elements of these guidelines. Accordingly, a mission statement has been developed to clarify the group's scope and focus in developing the guidelines.

Mission of the Operating Guidelines Group

This group will assist Reclamation in developing guidelines for Yakima Project operations that consider full and staged implementation of water stored, conserved, acquired, or otherwise enhanced by IP actions (IP water). Modifications to existing operations without IP actions will not be addressed by this group, as existing Yakima Project operations are considered in other forums such as the System Operations Advisory Committee (SOAC) discussions and Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance efforts. The guidelines will be developed with the expectation that operations will be refined during project-specific development and implementation.

What the Guidelines Will Address

The operating guidelines will address how to manage the Yakima Project to meet identified needs, account for IP water with TWSA, and adapt to changing conditions.

- *Certainty in meeting instream flow and out-of-stream needs* – The guidelines will specify how the Yakima Project will be managed by Reclamation as IP projects are completed to provide greater certainty in meeting the identified needs, including but not necessarily limited to:
 - Existing water rights
 - Existing “constraints” such as flood control and safety of dams operations
 - Instream flows:
 - Existing constraints for Title XII and state trust water right flows, Yakama Nation treaty rights, and ESA compliance
 - How and when high, medium, and lower priority instream flow objectives are achieved in specific river reaches
 - Supplemental supply for proratable water users in drought years
 - Municipal, domestic, and industrial supply.

- *Integrated Accounting System* – The guidelines will describe an accounting approach for IP water and TWSA:

- Identify in the system where TWSA and IP waters originate and reside and for what purposes such flows are used during the irrigation and non-irrigation periods to meet identified needs
 - Describe how TWSA and IP water is diminished/used and/or carried over in storage from year to year to meet identified needs
 - Identify TWSA and IP water for interim periods as individual IP projects and actions are implemented
 - Acknowledge accounting challenges such as (but not necessarily limited to) providing for potential improvements to snowpack through watershed enhancement actions, potential increased return flows when IP water is utilized for out-of-stream uses, floodplain storage and groundwater recharge, and conservation.
- *Operations and Adaptive Management* – Guidelines for integration/accounting of IP water will acknowledge the potential for adjustments to system operations based upon multiple factors, including but not limited to type of water year; improved understanding of instream needs; operational considerations; individual and collective effects from IP projects and actions; and anticipated changes to crop requirements, seasons, snowpack and runoff patterns from climate change.

The Operating Guidelines will identify membership and describe roles and responsibilities for a group similar to SOAC but with additional representation to coordinate with Reclamation on how to adaptively utilize additional water made available through IP implementation to meet the identified instream flow needs. This proposed group will make requests for specific water uses to Reclamation through agreed-upon notification processes developed by the Operating Guidelines Group.

Other Considerations

The guidelines will be developed with the understanding that operations will be refined during project-specific planning, permitting, and design phases.

Once the draft guidelines have been developed, an expected next step is for legal advisors comprised of irrigation district attorneys, Yakama Nation legal staff, state Attorney General's staff, Reclamation legal staff, and others, to identify and address legal issues to implement the guidelines, and provide guideline revisions. The legal advisors may also identify topics that could be addressed through future state and/or Federal legislation.

Additionally, the participants acknowledge the complexity of the assignment to address operational guidelines include technically challenging and legally intricate issues. These include, but are not limited to:

- How to account for IP water and TWSA over multiple years to include carry-over storage considerations, and replenishing the IP water after a drought.
- Developing operational accounting flexibility to improve the effectiveness, reliability, and certainty of instream flows when proratable supply is between 70% and 100%
- Adaptively managing instream flows recognizing the science on instream flow needs for fish continues to evolve.