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Meeting Notes Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Workgroup

**December 11, 2024
In-person and Teams Virtual Meeting**

Welcome, Introductions, and Agenda Overview

Anna Marandi with HDR Engineering, Inc. (HDR) welcomed the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project (YRBWEP) Workgroup members and other attendees participating virtually and in person. The following notes summarize the YRBWEP Workgroup presentations and public comments. For more information, please see the full presentations on the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (YBIP) website: [Yakima Basin Integrated Plan](#).

Executive and Implementation Committee Updates and 2024 Accomplishments

Wendy Christensen, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation: Wendy provided updates on Reclamation projects and funding. Reclamation is in the process of constructing new fish screens at Roza Dam. Reclamation has also provided \$11 million for Phase II of Naches River restoration and the state providing \$7.6 million. Wendy also noted ongoing advancements on both the Bateman Island project and the Springwood Ranch transfer of ownership to partners. Reclamation has calculated that along with partners they were successful in obtaining approximately \$44 million in funding for YRBWEP in FY2024. Also, in FY2024 Reclamation provided \$16 million under the Inflation Reduction Act and \$38 million under Water Smart funding, for a total of \$98 million in federal funding for YBIP from Reclamation. Reclamation is currently in FY2025 and under a continuing resolution for budget. Lastly, Wendy shared that Tom Tebb and Chris Lynch are both retiring and will be missed by the Workgroup.

Melissa Downes, Washington State Department of Ecology, Office of Columbia River: Melissa provided an Implementation Committee update regarding operating budget shortfalls in the coming years. With Governor Ferguson's transition there will also be a new state Ecology director, and the state has appointed Casey Sixkiller, who was formerly the Regional EPA director.

Melissa provided some project updates for 2024 including the Springwood Ranch land acquisition, and a cost-shared feasibility study between Ecology and Reclamation. Other project updates included the USGS smolt survival study, facility modernization of the Wapato Irrigation Diversion, Nelson Dam removal in Phase II, and Prosser and Chandler Dam evaluations.

On groundwater storage, the Yakama Nation is advancing the Toppenish Creek shallow aquifer recharge project. The Army Corps of Engineers is working on the Bateman Island delta restoration project to remove the causeway which will improve water temperatures and fish passage at the mouth of the



Yakima River. Conservation efforts this year included canal lining, water measuring devices, and on-farm improvements.

On the water marketing side, there was a lot of water right leasing with low water supply. This year (2024) was a drought, and this group addressed climate change, fish needs, fire impacts, and moving forward on collaborative efforts. Progress in the basin is possible thanks to this workgroup, partners, and communities.

Joe Blodgett, Yakama Nation: Joe reported that there were some challenges this year, but that they all worked through the drought thanks to this Workgroup. However, he pointed out that there were impacts to fish and many other species as well. He feels encouraged by the Cle Elum pool raise efforts and expressed excitement about fish migrating out of the basin, thanks to the helix. They are seeing positive outcomes with Sockeye in the Columbia River basin. The Yakama Nation are working throughout the basin with folks on the Columbia River side as well as Canada for Sockeye reintroduction.

The Lower River studies are wrapping up and the Tribe is learning about where they are losing smolts once they migrate out of the basin. There are concerns around smolt migration below Union Gap. Joe shared the news that the Yakama Nation is stepping in as a co-sponsor with the State for the Bateman Island Causeway project. They anticipate starting construction December 2025.

Monitoring with Partners in the Yakima Basin: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Craig Haskell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Craig led a presentation on the projects in the Yakima Basin and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's fish monitoring efforts. The presentation included:

- An organizational chart of the Mid-Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation office
- Projects spanning the Yakima Basin from the headwaters to the mouth of the Columbia River
- The role of monitoring fish: bull trout, salmon, steelhead, and freshwater mussels in the basin
- Freshwater mussel study and accomplishments

Craig went into greater detail about bull trout trends, different monitoring systems and locations:

- Two different monitoring systems, PIT monitoring, in Tributaries, and Acoustic monitoring, in Reservoirs.
- Genetic assessment of bull trout to see where they came from and the degrees of hybridization.
- Review of movement and timing of movement:
 - Since 2012 over two thousand bull trout have been released in the basin
 - PIT tag data are from two different programs:
 - Trap and Haul
 - Rescue and Rear program data include survival probabilities. The past few years they have seen below average survival probability. Flow conditions can affect monitoring equipment, and sometimes they get swept out.
- Taking advantage of the USGS (U.S. Geological Survey) study in Rimrock to understand bull trout entrainment and movement.
- Predictions of future bull trout spawning reaches through occupancy modeling.



- Identifying re-introduction/ conservation introduction locations.
- Habitat and watershed metrics.
 - Habitat metrics include mean August stream temperature, cold water availability, high flow frequency.
 - Watershed metrics include mean slope, volume, brook trout presence, road density, canopy cover, and connectivity.
- FWS is also working with KRD to monitor salmon and steelhead. Use of eDNA samples and visual surveys to understand where ecologically and culturally important freshwater mussels are.

After the presentation, Craig answered a variety of related questions.

Wendy Christensen stated since 1995, Reclamation has had an Interagency Agreement with USFWS and have supported a USFWS - YRBWEP liaison and biotechnicians as part of the Reclamation YRBWEP Team. USFWS helped prepare a programmatic tributary report to prioritize and focus future work in the tributaries. Reclamation relies on USFWS expertise to monitor benefits of ongoing fish passage and habitat work such as Clear Creek Fish Passage and Schaaque Habitat Improvement Project.

Alex Conley, Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board: Alex was impressed to see the Yakima team growing and updating the bull trout action plan data from 2012. He asked if we are only looking at a sample size in the Lower River. *Craig replied that the focus is on the Lower Yakima because the Western Ridge mussel is the focus. There are only four freshwater mussel species in the western U.S., so this makes it easy. Also collecting info on other species.*

Jeff Tayer, WS Department of Fish and Wildlife: Commented that Gold Creek is a great reminder of a founding pillar of YBIP.

Brandon Parsons, American Rivers: Is there a connection between mussels and stargrass? *Craig surmised that there may be a relationship. In general, mussels filter out contaminants and improve water quality.*

Mike Livingston, WS Department of Fish and Wildlife: how did this petition get started? *Craig replied that the petition was initiated by a group in Portland to investigate the mussels; they are finding mussels in Toppenish Creek.*

Tom Elliott, Yakama Nation: What was the pre-rate of the metabolism of streams? *Craig suggested that we should investigate this.*

5x5 Project Updates and Q&A (Five slides and five minutes for each project update)

1. Cle Elum Pool Raise

Wendy Christensen, Bureau of Reclamation:

- Wendy kicked off the 5X5 presentations by speaking about the Cle Elum Pool Raise.
- She shared a quick snapshot of the current project map and the completed work.



- The Cle Elum Pool Raise Project will increase water storage capacity in the Cle Elum Reservoir up to an additional 14,600 acre-feet. When the pool raise project is completed, the additional water will be dedicated to enhancing instream flows for fish rearing, fish habitat, and migration.
- Reclamation crew completed construction at Morgan Creek and continued work on Sandelin this year.

Kelly Clayton, Yakama Nation Fisheries:

- Kelly continued and went in-depth about a couple completed shoreline projects, in-progress projects, and remaining projects.
- Yakama Nation took on Domerie Bay, Night Sky, and Timber Cove
- Domerie Bay was completed October 25, and they created a 1:5:1 Sloped Rock Revetment
- Night Sky was completed November 15 and they created a 6:1 Sloped Perched beach.
- Timber Cove, acquisition is delayed by funding agreement but everything else is in place so planning to resume construction for this project in the next year.

2. Bateman Island

Mike Livingston: WA State Department of Fish & Wildlife:

- The feasibility study started with Corps of Engineers in 2019 and was completed in October of 2024.
- The Bateman Island causeway is a 550ft earthen dam that they anticipate removing next year.
- They are in communication with Columbia Park Marina about their options and will report back to the group.
- The next phase of the project will be a collaboration between the Yakama Nation and WDFW.
- Recent estimates show there is an increase in the project cost, but they have \$1.8 M committed through WDFW budget to be a co-sponsor for this project with Yakama Nation.
- The U.S. Corps of Engineers is doing the design.
- Mike noted that one of the bigger cost challenges is material disposal. Ideally, another project could take this material. They have been talking to the city of Richland to address use of the public boat launch below the marina.

Joe Blodgett, Yakama Nation Fisheries:

- With the release of the feasibility report, there has been some public pushback regarding loss of access to the island and fire evacuation. Project officials are trying to inform the public about the need to remove this causeway.
- All the smolts going out of the Yakima Basin go through here and lots of predators hang out in this causeway area. To show impact, Joe shared a photo of dead Sockeye near the Yakima River delta in July 2024 who were trying to migrate back upstream.
- The Yakima River is the third highest producer for Sockeye returning to the basin, they expected 6500 returned to Yakima and saw that 2790 fish made it to Prosser. Once the Helix is online and the causeway is removed, this will increase fish populations. Yakama Nation is funding \$2.7 M for the causeway removal from NOAA passage grant. They are advocating for more funding because they know that the price can increase for construction.

Cindy Boen, U.S. Corps of Engineers:



- Cindy shared from the process perspective that they are close to getting a partnership agreement for the design implementation phase completed and are waiting on reviews which will allow them to get federal funding going. Once these two things are done, this will let them get the design process started.

3. Gold Creek

Mel Babik, Kittitas Conservation Trust (KCT):

- Mel provided an overview of Gold Creek Restoration project and where they are in the project timeline.
- Gold Creek has experienced historic problems such as logging, gravel mining, an over-widened channel, lack of habitat suitability for bull trout, and a disconnected floodplain. Mel saw it dewater in mid-July and still have passage barriers on Halloween.
- She thanked Mitch Long, Executive Director of KCT, who has been pushing this project for 12 years.
- The goal is to reduce the extent of dewatering and add the additional in-stream complexity. To achieve this, they are adding 141 engineered log jams in 2.5 miles of the creek, excavating 1.4 miles of side channels to reconnect the floodplains with historic flows, filling thirty acres of legacy borrow pits, removing the levees isolating the creek, and planting 118,134 native plants.
- Gold Creek is listed in the top ten projects at the White House. Over \$40M does fully fund all 2.5 miles of instream restoration and they have \$1M extra to fill the pond. Despite some delays, the NEPA is complete.
- Mel shared a quick snapshot of the timeline and thanked all the partners that have played a role in this project over the years:
 - Winter 2025- permits
 - Spring 2025 bid/contract
 - Summer 2025 prep site/material stage and pond fish exclusion structure
 - Summer 2026-27 instream restoration all at one time
 - 2026-2031 pond fill
 - 2030-2031 recreational amenities

Jeff Tayer: Jeff commented that, one thing they have talked about with the integrated plan is getting enough capacity to do these big projects. One way we can do these large projects is that YBIP gets a lot of help from non-government partners. He wanted to recognize the nonprofit partners and irrigation partners contributions. There is sufficient funding for Bateman Island because partners in fisheries restoration have been so aggressive in finding funding.

Public Comments

John Reeves, Save Lake Kachess: Expressed that he has an issue with the 70% for pro-ratables number. He talked about a Department of Agriculture's presentation of the losses at 70%, and he would like to know, "70% of what?" If irrigators are asking for collaboration, he would like more transparency regarding these numbers. If there are 350,000 acre-feet, and they want 70% of that, then they should be clear. However, if irrigators are only using 85% of their full water right then he would like to know what that number is. He is also concerned about the loss of mussels if the Kachess River is lowered by another 80%. He is concerned about the Kachess River but expressed hope for the future.



David Ortman: David expressed concerns around the Bateman Island causeway removal project he thinks it is good because it removes one of the thermal barriers that prohibit the fish from migrating but believes that this is not part of the original YBIP. He wonders about other projects such as the Springwood Ranch acquisition, and why the YRBWEP Workgroup has not created a process to add projects like these to the plan. He wants to know what will happen as we keep adding projects to the Plan. He expressed that the Department of Ecology and Bureau of Reclamation seem to start projects and claim that it is part of YBIP without invoking supplemental EIS or review. He asked how these additional projects affect taxpayers.

Jean Mendoza, Friends of Toppenish Creek: She is happy to hear about healthy mussel population along Toppenish Creek and gave a shoutout to the people who fought the CAFO (concentrated animal feeding operation) to make that possible.

2024 Highlights

Abbey Gatlin, Bureau of Reclamation: Abbey shared the 2024 YBIP highlights handout. This year's Highlights is a retelling of the 5-year progress report that was submitted earlier this year to Congress and a wonderful way to capture all the important partnerships that developed over this time. There is a digital and print version which represents all the work of the Integrated Plan. This report can be used as a leave-behind for legislators and congressional folks. Here is a preview of the report's contents:

- Map of the Yakima River Basin
- Introduction by Sage Park and Urban Eberhart on behalf of the basin irrigation districts about the Integrated Plan
- Bull trout recovery
- Storage projects
- Integrated Plan accomplishments and challenges
- Specific project highlights such as Bateman Island Causeway
- Market reallocation
- Public engagement and partners
- Contributions that the Yakama Nation has and continues to make for this plan

The digital version of the YBIP 2024 Highlights can be found here:

https://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/yrbwep/2011integratedplan/newsletter/508_2024_YBIP_Highlights.pdf

Roundtable Discussion

Jason McShane, Kennewick Irrigation District: Wanted to highlight something from Craig's presentation: mussels have never been something we have talked about. Jason is excited to grow our understanding of needs, continued focus on the Lower River, and that the subgroup will be meeting regularly. He appreciates the efforts of those who came before them and wants to continue the great work.

Brandon Parsons, American Rivers: He said that although relationships were strained this past year with the drought, he is looking forward to the new year to regroup and continue to advance the work and building partnerships.



David Haws, Yakima County: He is excited by partnerships which make these projects possible, such as entering the next phase of the Nelson Dam removal project.

Amanda McKinney, Yakima County: Yakima County wants to get their storage, and Amanda expressed her readiness to work to do that. She appreciates that the Workgroup is working to ensure their external communications are understandable to the public. She is excited to commit to better communication and the positive impacts these projects have on the community.

Craig Haskell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Craig expressed excitement about becoming more engaged in the Workgroup and the Habitat Subcommittee. He is also excited about large future sockeye runs.

Cory Wright, Kittitas County: He is feeling optimistic and said that they will always get pushback at the local level. But he expressed excitement at the way a fully comprehensive, multi-benefit solution such as the Springwood Ranch acquisition will look.

Peter Dykstra, Plauche & Carr LLP: Started off by sharing the work of the Watershed Lands Subcommittee. On the upper watershed forest land, they have done it all. They have secured for conservation, recreation, clean water supply, fish, and farms, almost 100,000 acres of forest land, since started YBIP and have funding to do the rest including all 105,000 acres of forest land that was held in private ownership. The work of the watershed lands subcommittee has been successful in meeting the main goals they have had but also supportive of the rest of the plan. They are looking forward to helping other subcommittees achieve their goals.

David Felman, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District: Thinking about the water outlook, 2025 could potentially be a third year of drought, but all the work done collaboratively shows that we can get through tough times. Shows how important these relationships are.

Chad Stuart, Bureau of Reclamation: Pray for snow!

Charlie de la Chapelle, Yakima Basin Storage Alliance: Hoping for continued success but it has been jeopardized by the lack of progress for storage for agriculture and need for a good water year.

Scott Revell; Roza Irrigation District: Scott emphasized that September was extremely dry, and October was also dry, 26% of average water in storage. 230,000-240,000 acre-feet less than average. He agreed with Chad that snowfall is key. Although we gained snowpack from the bomb cyclone, we need more. Roza growers lost about \$4000-\$9000 per acre on the 2024 apple crop. This is a great reminder that the bulk of Roza land is owned by second and third generation farmers.

Jeff Tayer, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife: Jeff said that we have historically spent many resources playing defense against each other, but that is no longer the case. We are more united now than before and would not have achieved all these accomplishments without these alliances. He is going to miss Chris Lynch.

Madison Roy, Washington State Department of Agriculture: She painted a picture of agriculture in the area, with Washington state worth a total of \$14 billion, and Yakima County being one of the top agriculture counties in the country. Water and agriculture are tied together, and agriculture helps communicate the value of water.



Mike Shane, City of Yakima: Expressed that Nelson Dam Phase I was a huge success. Phase II is 3 months into construction. That project should be wrapping up by spring. With Phase II completion this will be a tremendous success for the city of Yakima and YBIP as a whole. Moving forward looking at ASR and continuing to develop their ASR program. They have a request to the Groundwater Subcommittee for additional funding.

Urban Eberhart, Kittitas Reclamation District: This Integrated Plan was never envisioned to be a set of projects that would stay the same. He is taking creating a list of future projects. The Integrated Plan must be adaptable and has adaptive management. We know so much more now than we did 15 years ago. All the seven elements help each other as they gather more information and more funding. Urban stressed that by focusing on positive energy we can continue to be creative and “make it like it was.” No one else in the U.S. is doing what this group does.

Alex Conley, Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board: A lot of success stories across the different sectors in this plan, but also some tough times. We have seen incredible implementation of projects and activities that they did not know they could do on the fisheries side. He is looking forward to updating the Bull Trout Action Plan and reevaluating the Steelhead Plan next year. The challenge is celebrating the successes and understanding the bottlenecks, the things that are still holding us back, and using the power of this group to balance the science and discuss alternatives to discuss action. On the fish side, we are investing in building on our understandings and adaptive management.

Mike Livingston, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife: 2024 bookends tremendous milestones and drought. He is so glad they had the Integrated Plan during 2024, which really highlighted everyone’s mission. We are a strong group with this plan, and he is excited for the next 15 years.

Joe Blodgett, Yakama Nation: Joe is thankful for Chris Lynch. He expressed a belief that the bull trout will tell them how things are going and learned early on that water is the most important responsibility of the Yakama Nation. They take this seriously, and sharing this goal with the Integrated Plan has brought the basin together. From the fish side, he expressed disappointment, but the group got through it, maintained relationships, and will use this plan to prepare for the future. Notably, the need for water is never going away. He acknowledged that Kelly Clayton has done great work on the Cle Elum pool raise. Securing the Springwood property was significant for the Yakama Nation and the basin. One concern he has is when they start implementing everything, they need to keep working together.

Melissa Downes, Washington State Department of Ecology: Melissa added another acknowledgement of Chris Lynch. She is looking towards the future and noticed a common theme of building capacity and knowing when to ask for help. There is going to be transition at many levels in 2025, including at the federal, state, and at the Department of Ecology – and even with new people at this Workgroup table. This is all going to take time, but if we continue to work together it will be successful.

Wendy Christensen, Bureau of Reclamation: Wendy stated that Chris Lynch is a great person, and he has helped so much with this project. As we look toward the new year, there will be a lot of changes with the new administrations and Office of Columbia River director (Tom Tebb’s role), but this group is up for the challenge. And a shout out to Kelly Clayton, as her work [on the Cle Elum pool raise] shows what we can do together.



Attendance

Workgroup Members:

Adam Fyall, Benton County (Alternate to Commissioner Will McKay)
Alex Conley, Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board
Amanda McKinney, Yakima County Commissioner
Brandon Parsons, American Rivers
Charlie de La Chapelle, Yakima Basin Storage Alliance
Cindy Boen, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Cory Wright, Kittitas County Commissioner
Craig Haskell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Danielle Squeochs, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Alternate to Phil Rigdon)
David Felman, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District
Jaclyn Hancock, Washington State Department of Agriculture
Jason McShane, Kennewick Irrigation District and Lower River Subgroup Chair
Jeff Tayer, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and Habitat Subcommittee Chair
Joe Blodgett, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Kathryn Furr, U.S. Forest Service (Alternate to David Farmer)
Madison Roy, Washington State Department of Agriculture (Alternate to Jaclyn Hancock)
Melissa Downes, Washington State Department of Ecology (Alternate to Tom Tebb)
Mike Livingston, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
Peter Dykstra, Watershed Lands Conservation Subcommittee Chair
Scott Revell, Roza Irrigation District
Sean Gross, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (Alternate to Justin Yeager)
Travis Okelberry, Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District
Urban Eberhart, Kittitas Reclamation District
Wendy Christensen, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Other Attendees:

Alison Pieper, HDR Engineering Inc.
Anna Lael, Kittitas County
Anna Marandi, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Arden Thomas, Kittitas County
Bonnie Miller
Brittany Beebe, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bruce Sully, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Chris Lynch, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Chris Maykut, Friends of Bumping Lake
Chris Perra, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Chris Pitre
Chad Stuart, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Cynthia Carlstad, Northwest Hydraulic Consultants
David Fisher, U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Consultant
David Haws, Yakima County
David Lind, Wakish
David McKenzie, Kennewick Irrigation District
David E. Ortman
Glenn Grette, Kennewick Irrigation District



Heather May, Washington State Department of Ecology
Hannah Baumbach, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Heather Baxter, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Jenna Scholz, HDR Engineering Inc.
Jean Mendoza, Friends of Toppenish Creek
Jim M
John Reeves, Save Lake Kachess
John Marvin, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Justin Bezold, Trout Unlimited
Joey Smith, HDR Engineering Inc.
Kelsey Green, Consultant to the Joint Board
Kevin Eslinger, Kittitas Reclamation District
Kevin Haydon, Washington State Department of Ecology
Larry Martin, HNW Law
Lily Sadataki, HDR Engineering, Inc.
Marcella Appel, Benton Conservation District
Matthew Punke, Seattle U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Merritt Mitchell, Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group
Mikahala Waters, Alta Science and Engineering
Nathan Cutler, EKI Consulting
Patrick Monk, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Patrick Moran, U.S. Geological Survey
Richard Evans, Maria Cantwell
Sage Park, Roza Irrigation District and Water Use Subcommittee Chair
Sanjay Barik, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife
Sara Vickers, Kittitas Reclamation District
Stuart Crane, Yakama Nation
Susan Woodward, American Rivers
Tim Poppleton, Washington State Department of Ecology
Tom Elliott, Yakama Nation Fisheries

Where to Find Workgroup Information

Meeting materials, notes, presentations, and materials submitted during public comment for each Workgroup meeting will be posted on Reclamation's project website: <http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/yrbwep/2011integratedplan/index.html>. A list of information sources, many available online, is also posted on the website.

If you need help finding an information source, contact those listed at the top of page 1 of these notes or Anna Marandi at HDR Engineering, Inc. anna.marandi@hdrinc.com.