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## **Meeting Notes**

### **Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Workgroup**

**December 10, 2025**  
**In-person and Teams Virtual Meeting**

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#### **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](#).

Anna shared a quick video featured on the Yakima County website that showed the South Fork Tieton fish passage progress. Anna also shared that a contractor has been selected for the Bateman Island causeway removal. And lastly, a recent volunteer event to clean up trash at Bateman Island was a success.

#### **Executive and Implementation Committees Updates**

**Presenters:** Chad Stuart, Reclamation; Larry Mattson, Ecology-OCR; Joe Blodgett, Yakama Nation

**Chad Stuart** noted how the atmospheric river has contributed some benefits to the basin. In the past two days the system gained about 100,000 acre-feet (ac-ft). The system is currently working with 350,000 ac-ft of storage and at this time last year (in 2024), they were only at 119,000 ac-ft and didn't cross over to 350,000 ac-ft until the end of March. Parker has peaked at 25,000 cfs and Chad is hoping that this will flush out lower river stargrass.

He also shared that they are celebrating 120 years of River Ops on December 11. The Bureau of Reclamation is still in a hiring freeze, and they have limited staff members doing their best to support multiple projects. Chris Duke recently retired, and Candy Carmack is now acting area manager while also performing her existing duties.

Lastly, Chad shared that the basin ended this third year of a drought with 40% reservoir storage capacity. It is now the third worst drought in history. Reclamation had to declare storage control on October 6<sup>th</sup> as natural flow events didn't meet the senior most water rights amounts, so subsequently, Ecology issued containment orders.

**Larry Mattson** shared that the atmospheric river has caused hazardous conditions in certain areas but is also appreciative that this has provided a lot of water to the system in the past week. Ecology has

released 1,400 containment orders since October. The Office of Columbia River has been working with Ecology's Water Resources program to provide consistent messaging to irrigators. The Bureau, the Department of Ecology and The Yakama Nation will be working with irrigators in the basin to discuss the containment. Larry thanked the Bureau staff for keeping the basin moving.

**Joe Blodgett** reiterated that it's nice to see their federal partners back at work. They have had some project delays, but a lot of passage projects will keep moving forward. The tribe is moving forward with the modernization of the Wapato Dam. They have started to model the designs and in-river screens, and they have begun to improve the water diversions. Joe mentioned that it is nice to see the river repairing itself right now. He shared his concerns about fish survival due to the third year of drought. It takes a huge hit on the species that live in the basin for only a few months. The fish took the biggest hit this year, but he acknowledged that every user of the basin felt the impacts of this drought. Joe shared his appreciation for the Workgroup and collaboration among Integrated Plan partners.

## **Box Canyon / Bull Trout Update**

**Presenters:** William Meyer, Josh Rogala, WDFW; Todd Newsome, Yakama Nation Fisheries

**William Meyer** presented on the 2025 Box Canyon Creek Bull Trout passage. He provided background about the project and how when the reservoir gets drawn down, bull trout passage is obstructed. He also gave his appreciation to Josh Rogala who has been working hard to implement the Box Canyon fish passage project, bringing many partners together. William showed an example of how they create flow with an artificial stream channel that connects to the reservoir. Before commencing this process, the team rescued any fish stuck in the creek.

William also described how partners with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Yakama Nation used submersible antennas and box antennas to track the fish that they have tagged to get the timing down.

Another passage location in the reservoir is Gold Creek; the stream has spread out so far that it's hard for fish to pass. They installed channel training structures to consolidate flow, so the water is deep enough for fish to make it up the reservoir bay. Other serious issues that they are working with the U.S. Forest Service to address include illegal off-roading.

In July last year, he added that reservoirs were full, but come October conditions had worsened, and that's when fish usually make the passage.

They have implemented this Box Canyon passage 8 times in total, with 5 times in the past 10 years. The average is 512 Bull Trout redd counts. As the reservoirs are declining, this aligns with the time that fish need to move up. The fish usually spawn in September, October, and November.

**Todd Newsome** described the Bull Trout Rescue program in Gold Creek. This involves catching fish by hand and 50-60% of them are brought into a small-scale facility and put in recirculators. They raise the fish until they can be released into Lake Kachess. In addition to raising these Bull Trout, the team rescues juveniles and PIT tags them to track success. From 2018 to 2025 they have rescued 2,712 fry and released 1,300 juveniles. These rescue efforts have resulted in about a 94% survival rate.

After the presentation, some Workgroup members mentioned that they were thankful for the work that this group has done and are glad that they have focused on Bull Trout. Without the partnerships and trust between parties that are hallmarks of the Integrated Plan, this work would not be possible. Another member mentioned that these survival rates have increased due to habitat restoration work.

## Trout Unlimited Presentation

**Presenter:** Justin Bezold, Trout Unlimited

**Justin Bezold** has been with Trout Unlimited (TU) since 2014. TU is a national nonprofit founded in 1959. Washington State TU has 25+ staff, and they have support in Olympia and Washington D.C. They have 4 staff focused on the Yakima River. TU has been part of YBIP since 2015 and has been involved in the policy, project, and partnership level. TU is a committed partner with dedicated staff, and they have flexibility to work throughout the basin. Since they are non-regulatory, TU can work directly with landowners, water users, irrigation districts, and other stakeholders. Justin provided a list of specific project examples in the basin that TU has worked on:

- Bateman Island marina removal, working closely with the marina owners.
- Tjossem Ditch – downstream from Ellensburg to retire an aging Yakima River ditch (>12 cfs) for floodplain and flow benefits.
  - o Finding more water for fish, Kittitas County, and irrigators through:
    - water acquisitions
    - diversion changes
    - water conservation
- Swauk Creek:
  - replacing and improving the existing pipeline to improve flows in lower Swauk Creek
  - good planning to provide ~10 cfs during low flow periods
  - success of KRD Streamflow Supplementation and partnerships
  - fire protection

TU also supports water marketing, which means facilitating water right transfers for fish and community benefits. They deploy smart market pilot implementation and electronic matching of buyers and sellers. This is a multi-benefit water right acquisitions tool that is precise, flexible, and available when we need it.

In the lower Yakima River, TU works to increase flow and passage for fish. The organization develops partnerships with irrigation districts and other local partners to improve flow for fish.

Additional projects include:

- Wanawish Dam, working with Yakama Nation and Columbia Irrigation District to help improve streamflow, which affects fish habitat and water leasing and diversion reductions to help with pulse flows
- Box Culvert on Cold Creek, multiple culverts on Crystal Creek and on Williams Creek

Justin thanked their major funders then opened the floor for questions. Many members expressed their gratitude to TU and shared how the organization can achieve many elements that benefit the Integrated Plan. Members also thanked TU for their advocacy work in D.C.

## Public Comment

John Reeves with Lake Kachess commented that he has been seeing many articles that the Integrated Plan is at work. He hears the word “reservoir” a lot including in an article from American Rivers in October and another from WDFW, also using the word “reservoirs” on November 25. He said that no other basins use this word and stressed that it is okay to use the word “lake”. After this comment, John shared with the group his appreciation for the Bull Trout efforts.

## Watershed Lands Conservation Subcommittee Report Out

**Presenter:** Peter Dykstra, Chair, Watershed Lands Conservation Subcommittee

**Peter Dykstra** first shared some history and the goals of the Watershed Lands Conservation Subcommittee, which was established in 2012. The purpose of the group is to advise the YRBWEP Workgroup on options for implementing the Targeted Watershed Protection and Enhancement element of the Integrated Plan. Membership includes partners who are involved in land conservation and management. The group uses two land plans to guide their work: Phase 1 and Phase 2. In 2012, the group discussed how they were going to do “lands work” as part of the Integrated Plan. Part of their guiding principles were to only acquire land or easements from willing sellers at fair market value. The group has a committed obligation to restoration and management.

Peter shared examples of forest land acquisitions and shrub steppe acquisitions in Phase 1 of the plan. They had a cap of 55,000 acres for forest land acquisitions and a cap of 15,000 acres for shrub steppe acquisitions. By 2021, Phase 2 had expanded the forest land acquisition target. Peter talked about specific examples, such as the Teanaway Community Forest (TCF). They purchased TCF in 2013 and it is now owned by the Department of Natural Resources with a Department of Fish & Wildlife easement. There are extensive restoration efforts ongoing across TCF. This past year, the Legislature extended the water supply facility permit milestone to 2035. Both the operating budget funding for stewardship and management funding continue to be a challenge. After the presentation, Workgroup members asked questions.

Q: Where does floodplain acquisition land in priorities?

A: The watershed lands subcommittee doesn’t have a plan for that yet.

Q: Is there a broad outline of Phase 3 Plan?

A: The subcommittee group will meet in January, and they will create one.

Members expressed their thanks for Peter and the Subcommittee’s work for lands acquisitions which has led to restoration work.

## Celebrating Mike Shane and Looking to 2026

Dave Brown spoke first about Mike Shane’s retirement, with 39 years in the water business, and shared that one of his first projects was rebuilding a diversion. Mayor Patricia Byers shared a litany of Mike’s accomplishments at the city, and she shared her appreciation for his work and legacy. Commissioner Amanda McKinney also shared her gratitude for Mike and her thanks for David Haws and Troy Havens who have worked hard on projects. Justin Harter and several other Workgroup members spoke, including Jeff Tayer. Jeff expressed his gratitude to all the partners who helped tough projects get across

the finish line this year.

Charlie de la Chapelle shared that the atmospheric rivers we are experiencing are straight from the region's climate models for the Pacific Northwest, and this underscores the need for more storage.

Joe Blodgett thanked Mike Shane and is confident that all of his knowledge has been passed on to the county and that he has always been a great sounding board for their water issues. Joe emphasized that there is a lot of work ahead of us.

Urban thanked Mike and appreciated the close partnership with the city of Yakima.

Adam shared that the Tri-Cities Herald is reporting that the last day to access Bateman Island via the causeway is December 21<sup>st</sup> and work begins on January 5<sup>th</sup>.

### **Attendance (Online and In-Person)**

#### **Workgroup Members and Alternates:**

Adam Fyall, Benton County  
Alex Conley, Yakama Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board  
Amanda McKinley, Yakima County  
Bill Gale, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Brandon Parsons, Outreach Committee Co-Chair, American Rivers  
Chad Stuart, Bureau of Reclamation  
Charlie de la Chapelle, Yakima Basin Storage Alliance  
Craig Haskell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Danielle Squeochs, Groundwater and Storage Subcommittee Chair, Yakama Nation  
David Blodgett III, Yakama Nation Fisheries  
David Felman, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District  
David Haws, Yakima County  
Jaclyn Hancock, Washington State Department of Agriculture  
Jason McShane, Lower River Subgroup Co-Chair, Kennewick Irrigation District  
Jeff Tayer, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife  
Jim Milton, Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District  
Joe Blodgett, Yakama Nation Fisheries  
Larry Leach, Washington State Department of Natural Resources  
Larry Mattson, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Melissa Downes, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Mike Livingston, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife  
Mike Shane, City of Yakima  
Patricia Byers, City of Yakima  
Peter Dykstra, Watershed Lands Conservation Subcommittee Chair  
Sage Park, Roza Irrigation District  
Scott Revell, Roza Irrigation District  
Sean Gross, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service  
Seth Defoe, Kennewick Irrigation District  
Shane Leonard, Kennewick Irrigation District  
Theo Burgoon, Trout Unlimited

Travis Okelberry, Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District  
Urban Eberhart, Outreach Committee Co-Chair, Kittitas Reclamation District

**Other Attendees:**

Alan Chapman, Whatcom Conservation District  
Alex Lopez, Bureau of Reclamation  
Alison Pieper, HDR Engineering Inc.  
Anna Lael, Kittitas County Conservation District  
Anna Marandi, HDR Engineering Inc.  
Bailey Draper, South Yakima Conservation District  
Brian Schmidt, Bureau of Reclamation  
Bruce Sully, Bureau of Reclamation  
Chris Maykut, Friend of Bumping Lake  
Craig Broadhead, Environmental Science Associates  
Connor Thompson, Ducks Unlimited  
Curt Strifert, Columbia Irrigation District  
Cynthia Bounds, Hanford Mission Integrated Solutions  
Cynthia Carlstad, Northwest Hydraulic Consultants  
David Brown, Retired  
David Child, Bureau of Reclamation  
David Fast, Retired  
David Fisher, Consultant, Bureau of Indian Affairs  
David McKenzie, Kennewick Irrigation District  
Devin Stoker, Anchor QEA  
Diani Taylor, Plauché & Carr  
Ed Lisowski, Washington State Department of Agriculture  
Evan Abell, Yakima Herald  
Glenn Grette, Kennewick Irrigation District  
Jean Mendoza, Friends of Toppenish Creek  
Jeff Bond, City of Yakima  
Jennifer Johnson, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife  
Jennifer Stephens, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Joel Hubble, Consultant, Yakima Basin Joint Board  
John Crotty, Western Legal PLLC  
John Reeves, Save Lake Kachess  
John Stuhlmiller, Washington State Water Resources Association  
Joshua Rogala, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife  
Justin Bezold, Trout Unlimited  
Justin Harter, Naches-Selah Irrigation District  
Justin Yeager, Yakama Nation Fisheries  
Keith Wolf, Yakima County  
Kelly Clayton, Yakama Nation Fisheries  
Kelsey Green, Consultant, Yakima Basin Joint Board  
Kevin Haydon, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Kyle Hill, Washington Water Trust  
Leif Krapas, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Leslie Druffel, The McGregor Company  
Lily Sadataki, HDR Engineering, Inc.



Merritt Mitchell, Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group  
Michael Horner, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Norman Semanko, Parsons Behle & Latimer  
Patrick Monk, Bureau of Reclamation  
Paula Pecorella, HDR  
Questen Inghram, Yakima Herald  
Rebecca Gutshall, Bureau of Reclamation  
Rebecca Springer, City of Ellensburg  
Rick Dieker, Retired  
Roland Springer, Bureau of Reclamation  
Sara Vickers, Kittitas Reclamation District  
Scott Turner, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Shane Sheldon, Jacobs  
Shawna Warehime, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Steve Carpenter, Retired  
Steven Hockett, Washington State Department of Ecology  
Stuart Crane, Yakama Nation Water Resources  
Susan Woodward, American Rivers  
Tim Hill, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Tim Poppleton, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR  
Todd Newsome, Yakama Nation Fisheries  
Trevor Hutton, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife  
Walt Larrick, Consultant, Yakima Basin Joint Board  
William Meyer, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife

## **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, please contact those listed at the top of page 1 of these notes or Anna Marandi at HDR Engineering, Inc. [anna.marandi@hdrinc.com](mailto:anna.marandi@hdrinc.com)