

Contact: Chad Stuart, Bureau of Reclamation (509) 573-8101
Larry Mattson, Washington State Department of Ecology (509) 907-1340

Meeting Notes

Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Workgroup

June 10, 2026

In-person and Teams Virtual Meeting

Welcome/Introductions and Agenda Overview

Joey Smith with HDR Engineering, Inc. (HDR) welcomed the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project (YRBWEP) Workgroup members and other attendees both online 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 Committees Updates

Presenters: Chad Stuart, Reclamation; Larry Mattson, Ecology-OCR; David Blodgett III, Yakama Nation

Chad Stuart shared that we are in the fourth year of drought, and it is a difficult time for our partners – fisheries, farms, and municipalities and he appreciates everyone’s continued engagement. The reservoir system is at 52% and the basin is facing unprecedented challenges. The group has had good success with pulse flows during this drought year. Water is passing through the new Cle Elum helix system for the first time, and Reclamation hopes to have the entire system including the adult collection facility functional by next summer. Reclamation operated the helix for fish passage for three months but stopped operations a few days ago due to safety concerns.

Larry Mattson shared a few thoughts regarding his first year as the OCR Director. He is focused on policy and referenced the Colorado River as a basin facing difficult challenges with the lowest water level in decades. He reiterated the importance of the fish passage solutions the group is focusing on and highlighted that good communication among all partners, including those in the lower river, is critical. He also told the Workgroup about the Washington Water Futures Initiative that will roll out over the next 60-90 days by Department of Ecology Director, Casey Sixkiller. It includes six invitation-only, in-person roundtable discussions – two on the east side of the state and four on the west side. There will be several online discussions as well. He stressed that these are “listening sessions” and that Director Sixkiller is aware that YRBWEP is ahead of other basins in terms of collaboration and solutions.

David Blodgett III shared that Yakama Nation Fisheries is transitioning from spring season management on June 15th to summer management. They had low forecasted runs this year and the results were even lower than projected. In fact, the runs were lower than they had been in 10 years. The Yakama Nation celebrated Treaty Days this week, and reiterated that in a drought water year, fish

numbers are very low. He urged everyone to continue working towards groundwater and surface storage to help the group's goals.

Joe Blodgett welcomed the group to Toppenish, the center of Yakama Nation's Reservation. He thanked Chad Stuart for operating the helix this year and said that the basin will reap the benefits from these efforts in the future. Reintroducing many of the fish back into the system and removing obstacles, improving fish passage and supporting the co-existence of fish and other needs depends on good communication and dialogue despite challenges and differences.

Joe also shared photos and highlights from the Bateman Island Causeway removal, and the "Reconnecting Chamna" event where the Yakama Nation hosted a celebration and salmon luncheon for partners and the public. **Cindy Boen** with the US Army Corps of Engineers also said a few words about the Bateman Island causeway removal and thanked partners.

Cle Elum Fish Passage: Helix Debut and Operations

Presenters: Pat Monk, Bureau of Reclamation; Andrew Matala, Yakama Nation Fisheries

Andrew Matala shared that operations of the helix stopped operations a few days ago due to safety concerns. After a tumultuous water year and even flooding in the upper Cle Elum area, by the time they were able to use the helix, water levels were very high. He shared photos of operations, pit tagging, and smolts. They deployed just under 5,000 pit tags and detected 596 downstream or about 12% of total tags. Of these, 94% of these tags have only been detected on a single array. They are learning about transit time for fish down the river from the point of release, transit behavior, and survival rates. One of the biggest detection areas was Sunnyside. The information collected is highly valuable and he thanked everyone who collaborated on the project.

Pat Monk talked about helix operations and monitoring at Roza. He talked about other tags for specific studies to help understand what attracts fish. Reclamation is gathering information at several sites to better understand fish behavior. He shared photos of fish being tagged and released. He also shared photos and talked about improvements at Roza that are being monitored, studied, and reassessed. Survival studies will continue at Cle Elum at Roza.

Sean Gross expressed his appreciation for Reclamation, Yakama Nation, and others for going from the science and data phase of "what needs to be fixed" to a complicated design process, and finally, implementation. He acknowledged that the first few years of operations for big projects are always very challenging and that new rounds of monitoring will be incredibly helpful for the team.

Low Snowpack, Drought Conditions and Climatology

Presenter: Karin Bumbaco, Washington State Climate Office

Karin Bumbaco acknowledged that in the Pacific Northwest, drought is not always just a lack of precipitation or a dry spell and is usually measured by more than one drought metric. In the past we have had dry winters which resulted in low snowpack. More recently, warmer winters with normal precipitation have also resulted in lower snowpacks and thus drought conditions. She stressed that

temperatures are warming in all seasons in Washington State, and that we should expect this warming to continue in the future.

The Cascades are lower than other western states' mountain ranges, so warmer temperatures have more of an impact on their snowpack. Summer rain is also decreasing. This warming-driven snowpack loss is occurring more frequently now than in the past, with earlier runoff timing. We can expect the likelihood of snow drought in the future (as defined by 75% less snow than normal) to happen about four years per decade now, and in the long term, it will reach every seven years per decade. Climate models are not showing drier winters, but with the warming, we will have more rain and less snow, and all seasons except for summer will likely be wetter.

Karin also shared information on NOAA's climate models for the state and its wildfire outlook. Risk is elevated in June on the east side and heightens for the rest of the state over the course of the summer. Karin talked about El Nino conditions and the concern that snowfall decreases during these winters. She shared that there is currently high confidence that an El Nino will occur this year.

Danielle Squeochs shared that Karin did an excellent job of separating supply and demand. She commented on the long regulatory history of surface water rights and that groundwater rights were never adjudicated. The regulatory framework must be considered in the Yakima Basin.

Karin expressed gratitude and how honored and inspired she is to be able to present to this group.

Public Comment

John Reeves thanked the Yakama Nation for hosting him. He feels that the Workgroup must be more transparent about its efforts, particularly its storage projects.

David Ortman had questions about the Department of Ecology's drought emergency declaration and asked about the lessons Ecology and Reclamation have learned about issuing precise predictions of water availability earlier in the year rather than a range that reflects uncertainty. He asked about previous drought years and how Ecology ensures that water taken from an unnamed spring is curtailed. He submitted two additional questions by email: are meetings of the Implementation and Executive Committee still closed to the public? And referencing when the last time was that Yakima Plan cost figures were updated and what these figures are.

YRBWEP Partner Spotlight: Washington Department of Natural Resources

Presenters: Scott McFarland and Collin Haffey, Washington Department of Natural Resources

Scott McFarland shared that he started at DNR about a year and a half ago. Their office is based out of Ellensburg and covers fifteen counties. He talked about the DNR strategic plan and operationalizing the plan through various methods including prescribed fires and improving forest health to create a more resilient landscape. Scott discussed an interagency dashboard that helps strategic planning during emergencies and how to treat the landscape. Two of the biggest fires in the state happened in this region last year, but fortunately the team had done a lot of proactive work, especially around the Teanaway Community Forest.

Collin Haffey talked about post-fire recovery and the associated impacts on the landscape ecology including hazardous conditions and heightened risks such as severe flooding, debris flows, and landslides. His program provides coordination after fires to bring jurisdictions and fire experts together. In Yakima-Tieton, he highlighted areas that were vulnerable to post-wildfire debris flow. Collin also focuses on pre-fire coordination with state agencies and local communities. Local governments have stressed the need for coordination and good points of contact and that recovery requires sustained interagency coordination.

Collin talked about the Fan Plan and the connection with stream restoration and how sedimentation is needed, but it must be in the right places for optimum river health. He added that log work is post-fire recovery work.

Collin's team is piloting a susceptibility assessment in Chelan County and Leavenworth since they have not yet had a fire. This will help them identify vulnerable infrastructure and create a mitigation strategy using stream systems and improving infrastructure. They're also working on an emergent project with American Rivers to develop a practitioner network and examine post-fire recovery actions in advance of fires.

Alex Conley shared that he is impressed by this work and the results. **Adam Fyall** also noted a big difference in the Tri-Cities fire response, and that with improved aerial support, a huge difference was made.

Larry Leach talked about fuel breaks in the Teanaway Forest, which helped prevent additional burning. They await state funding allocations so they know how much more of this type of work DNR will be able to do. He mentioned forest thinning for fire safety and snowpack retention in the Teanaway, noting that there is also watershed restoration occurring in the Teanaway. He reiterated that wetter forests will not burn. He acknowledged that fire is a natural part of this landscape, and we must learn to live with it, and that restoration work helps prevent catastrophic fires. They have hired a recreation warden for the Teanaway because having staff that can help with camping sites, including law enforcement, is hugely impactful.

Yakama Nation Wildfire Preparedness

Presenters: Don Jones and James Brown, Yakama Nation Fuels Management

James Brown and **Don Jones** co-presented, sharing several videos to help illustrate what the Fuels Management team does. Several fires have occurred already in well-traveled areas. The team has worked on prescribed fires with the tribal forestry team. It is difficult to treat certain areas on the reservation, when they are considering where to do prescribed fires. Fuels Management funds this work, but additional objectives can be added to the plan. They can do protection work along the Klickitat River – a heavily used area. They also do a lot of work in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). The videos demonstrated pile burns that the Fuels team does late in the fall.

Unfortunately, they have missed several cycles of prescribed burns due to high risk levels two years ago and the government shut down last year, both of which hurt the team's ability to get ahead of fire risks. They also clean and remove debris from creek areas and after those prescribed burns, native and culturally valuable plants and first foods such as camas have returned. They've also done prescribed burns for Wapato Irrigation to prevent larger fires, specifically addressing the tumbleweeds in the

ditches. In areas that have not been treated, a lightning strike can cause severe damage. Overall, their prescribed burns protect Yakama Nation's natural and cultural resources. Burning near the creeks also helps prevent fires from spreading to tribal members' homes and when this is not done, the effects can be devastating.

Joe Blodgett shared a story about his elderly aunt who lost her house in the Slide Ranch fire in White Swan two years ago and barely survived. He thanked the Fuels team for doing important work.

Final Thoughts: Workgroup Members

Workgroup members shared their gratitude for the presentations. **Joe Blodgett** stressed the need to keep collaborating and communicating. **Commissioner McKinney** thanked the partners for sharing their stories on wildfire management and how Washington State is a model for the country. **Urban Eberhart** commented on the evolution of the Integrated Plan, and how forest and ecosystem health has risen in importance to the group, particularly in the Teanaway Forest and across the basin. Healthy forests hold more water and are more resistant to catastrophic burns. He noted that fire is a key part of the ecosystem's health and thanked the presenters for their work. **Sean Gross** thanked the Yakama Nation for hosting and for their leadership. **Theo Burgoon** thanked Karin Bumbaco for her presentation, as did **Jaclyn Hancock**. She hopes we can stress the need for a unified message to the state legislature to protect agriculture and fisheries. **Adam Fyall** appreciated the presentations and the intersection between aquatic restoration and wildfire resilience and capturing sediment. The needs of the watershed are all connected. **Craig Haskell** thanked Anna Marandi for her facilitation services. **Danielle Squeochs** shared that historically, relations between the US government and the Yakama Nation were adversarial and condescending. Today, she feels the privilege of being in a room where there is a great deal of trust and strong partnerships, and the group is working together to solve common goals. She expressed that we must work hard to maintain this trust and these partnerships. **Mike Porter** thanked the presenters for their focus on resiliency goals. **Sage Park** appreciated the presentations and thanked Collin Haffey for the focus on post-fire recovery in Yakima-Tieton. **Arden Thomas** stressed that all the work leading up to this moment are so important to recognize, including the Cle Elum helix milestone. It took a great deal of hard work and resources. She appreciated the presentations on wildfire preparedness and treatments, noting that in Kittitas County, residents are very concerned about this threat. She also said that DNR has been a great partner to Kittitas County.

Joey Smith thanked **Becky Gutshall** with Reclamation for her support at the Workgroup as she is now finishing graduate school and moving on from her internship.

Attendance (*Denotes online participation)

Workgroup Members and Alternates:

Adam Fyall, Benton County
Alex Conley, Yakama Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board
Amanda McKinney, Yakama County
Arden Thomas, Municipal Subgroup Chair, Kittitas County
Candy Carmack, Bureau of Reclamation
Chad Stuart, Bureau of Reclamation
Cindy Boen, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Charlie de la Chapelle, Yakima Basin Storage Alliance
Craig Haskell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Daniel Tiliano, City of Yakima
Danielle Squeochs, Groundwater and Storage Subcommittee Chair, Yakama Nation
David Blodgett III, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Jaclyn Hancock, Washington State Department of Agriculture
Jason McShane, Lower River Subgroup Co-Chair, Kennewick 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 Porter, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Peter Dykstra, Watershed Lands Conservation Subcommittee Chair*
Sage Park, Water Use Subcommittee Chair, Roza Irrigation District
Sarah Ehmer, Yakima County
Scott McFarland, Washington State Department of Natural Resources
Sean Gross, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service
Seth Defoe, Kennewick Irrigation District*
Shane Leonard, Kennewick Irrigation District*
Theo Burgoon, Trout Unlimited
Urban Eberhart, Outreach Committee Co-Chair, Kittitas Reclamation District

Other Attendees:

Aislinn Williamson, HLA*
Alan Chapman, Whatcom Conservation District*
Andrew Matala, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Anna Lael, Kittitas County Conservation District*
Brandon O'Rourke*
Brian Couch, NOAA
Brian Schmidt, Bureau of Reclamation
Chris Perra, Yakama Nation*
Chris Wilke, Center for Environmental Law & Policy*
Collin Haffey, Washington State Department of Natural Resources
Cynthia Bounds*
Cynthia Carlstad, Northwest Hydraulic Consultants
David Lind, Wakish*
David Ortman*

Derya Sumer, HDR
Diani Taylor, Plauché & Carr
Don Jones, Yakama Nation Fuels Management
Ed Lisowski, Washington State Department of Agriculture*
Elizabeth Heether, Reclamation
Eric Grossarth, HDR*
Erika Lopez, Department of Interior*
Everett Isaac, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Glenn Grette, Kennewick Irrigation District*
Heather Baxter, HDR*
Heather May, Washington State Department of Ecology*
James Brown, Yakama Nation Fuels Management
Jean Mendoza, Friends of Toppenish Creek*
Jeff Dermond, Ecology, OCR
Jennie Franks, NOAA
Jennifer Stephens, Washington State Department of Ecology*
Jesse Dixon, Yakama Nation Fisheries*
Joe Amend, Columbia Irrigation District*
Joey Smith, HDR
John Crotty, Western Legal PLLC*
John Reeves, Save Lake Kachess
John Stuhlmiller, Washington State Water Resources Association*
Justin Bezold, Trout Unlimited*
Karin Bumbaco, Washington State Climate Office
Keith Wolf, Yakima County*
Kelsey Green, Consultant, Yakima Basin Joint Board of Irrigation Districts
Kevin Haydon, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR
Kyle Hill, Washington Water Trust*
Leif Krapas, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR
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*
Richard Visser
Rebecca Gutshall, Bureau of Reclamation
Sara Vickers, Kittitas Reclamation District
Sarah Drydahl, American Rivers
Sarah Ehmer, Yakima County
Scott Cave*
Scott Favrot, Yakama Nation Fisheries*
Scott Turner, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR
Shaelyn Molvik, Ahtanum Irrigation District/ Union Gap Irrigation District
Shane Sheldon, Jacobs*
Shannon McClellan, Washington State Department of Ecology*
Shawna Warehime, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR
Steven Hockett, Washington State Department of Ecology*
Stuart Crane
Susan Woodward, American Rivers

Tim Poppleton, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR*
Tom Elliott, Yakama Nation Fisheries*
Tom Tebb
Trevor Hutton, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife
Walt Larrick, Consultant, Yakima Basin Joint Board of Irrigation Districts

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.