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Meeting Notes
Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Workgroup

September 9, 2026
In-person and Teams Virtual Meeting

Welcome/Introductions and Agenda Overview/ Ground Rules

Derya Sumer 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: http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/yrbwep/2011integratedplan/index.html.

Executive and Implementation Committees Updates

Presenters: Chad Stuart, Reclamation; Larry Mattson, Ecology-OCR; Phil Rigdon, Yakama Nation

Chad Stuart provided a staffing update, noting that the Reclamation has a staffing cap of 909 positions and is currently at approximately 780, allowing about 120 positions to be filled. The area office expects to have approximately 10 to 11 positions. He mentioned multiple positions will be operational staff at the YFO. Additionally, they are beginning the hiring process for the YRBWEP manager.

Larry Mattson reflected on a conversation with Sister Kathleen Ross, co-founder of Heritage University, and the importance of the campus and its history to the tribal community. As part of his update, he noted that recent work has focused on drought and development of the 2027 - 2029 YBIP budget, which includes more than $50 million across the seven elements of the Integrated Plan. Priorities include surface and groundwater storage, particularly on the Yakama Reservation, while considering fish habitat and storage. Looking into the next quarter, he will also consider energy demand and groundwater storage which will help identify projects that can maintain momentum and provide benefits to the community.

Joe Blodgett put in perspective the shared stress about this year's drought. He emphasized how they celebrate adult returns in the hundreds versus the thousands. However, he shared how 20 years ago there were extirpated stocks of fish in the basin that were completely

eliminated. After reintroduction, seeing returns of small smolts gives them hope. Joe also shared that they have had zero Spring Chinook harvests from the basin this year. However, the continued collaboration and work from this group demonstrates that there are solutions.

YBIP Project Highlights

Presenters: Michael Horner, Washington State Department of Ecology; Andrew Matala, Yakama Nation Fisheries; Marcella Appel, Benton Conservation District; Sage Park, Roza Irrigation District.

Michael Horner shared a water conservation status of Phase II: Basin Conservation Program which aims to increase instream flows and agricultural drought resilience, with a 110,000 acre-feet per year goal for instream flow and a 55,000 acre-feet per year goal for drought resiliency. He noted that Phase II is made of public funding, Federal, State and district funding. He noted that Phase II provided 58,235 acre-feet of storable water for instream flow in 2025. Phase III will expand conservation efforts through projects such as WIP piping, Heritage Garden improvements, and sealing the Roza Main Canal. Phase III funding comes from Federal, State, irrigation districts and conservation districts. Phase III has an 85,000 acre-feet conservation goal by 2029 with a goal of 170,000 acre-feet over 30 years.

Andrew Matala shared observations of the sockeye return post causeway removal and mentioned the importance of evaluating trends over multiple years. He clarified that this is data from year one of the return. He compared 2024 and 2025 returns, noting differences in timing and conditions related to the thermal barrier and delta flows. Previously, there have been large Sockeye mortality events in the delta area due to warm water and little oxygen. It is too early to determine the causeway effect, but this year's Yakima returns show encouraging results, with more fish expected as water temperatures cool. The Columbia River can now refresh some of the warm water around Bateman Island. This is a positive outcome, but more years of data are needed.

Marcella Appel shared an update on water star grass harvesting funded through a 2025 Ecology drought funding grant. The team assessed 15 river miles and completed 40 cutting days between July 1 and Sept 15, including harvesting and removal of accumulated vegetation in the Yakima Delta, and near the CID intake. She highlighted significant improvements in vegetation conditions and noted that adaptive management continues as the team evaluates harvesting methods, flow impacts, and additional data needs. She also played a video of how the star grass was being harvested.

Sage Park shared a pilot testing construction noting that 84% of the basin lacks reservoirs to capture runoff. Sage is focusing on Roza's aquifer storage and recovery project, however, other locations for storage and reservoir projects include Springwood, City of Yakima, Moxy, and Prosser. Roza's pilot testing is moving into construction, with water injections expected to begin Friday or Monday.

Current Hydrologic Conditions and the Very Strong El Niño

Presenter: Karin Bumbaco, Washington State Climate Office

Karin Bumbaco shared an update on current hydrologic conditions and the very strong El Niño noting that 2026 was warmer than normal with near normal precipitation across Washington and Yakima County. She reported that Yakima County experienced its fourth warmest water temperatures through October - July record, while precipitation was about 103% of normal. She mentioned that this weather pattern is highly likely to persist through the winter. Karin also discussed the strengthening El Niño and its potential for warmer, drier winter conditions and reduced snowpack, while emphasizing the uncertainty and variability seen in past strong El Niño events. Elevated wildfire potential was also noted heading into September.

Public Comment

Jean Mendoza had a question related to conservations going on in the community mentioning if farmer or irrigation on how much of water are you prepared to give up for data centers, for fishermen how much water willing to take from instream flows for data centers?

Mike Porter asked Jean if she is aware of any proposed data centers in the Yakima Basin

Jean Mendoza replied she is unaware of any data centers at the moment.

David Ortman: Noted that the workgroup agenda was not posted on the website prior to the meeting. He commented that on May 6, Governor Ferguson and Ecology announced Washington's water future initiative, but the presentation was not part of the workgroup meeting in June and is not present today. He asked if this presentation will be published on the website. David asked if the public is allowed at the executive or implementation committee meeting. The facilitator answered no. David also commented about the brief acknowledgement of sockeye returns through the Cle Elum Helix and noted that public comment should be allowed at the end of the meeting.

Enhancing the Source & Restoring the Flow – Gold Creek Valley Restoration, Phase 1 Update

Presenters: Mitch Long, Kittitas Conservation Trust; Audrey Scott, Yakama Nation Fisheries.

Mitch Long shared an update on Gold Creek Valley Restoration which addresses impacts from historic logging, mining, and development that have contributed to dewatering and habitat degradation. Significant investment has gone into planning, permitting, and design, with support from YBIP, USFWS, the Yakama Nation, and other partners. Phase 1 construction began this year and includes filling gravel pits, installing engineered log jams, improving streamflow and floodplain conditions, and restoring fish habitat. Fish were relocated during de-fishing efforts, and approximately 141 log jams and 15,000 plantings are planned as part of the restoration work. The team highlighted the substantial progress made during a short construction season and the strong performance of project contractors. Next steps include continued construction, permitting adjustments to provide greater flexibility around changing flows and fish needs, and securing additional funding to advance future phases.

Scott Revell asked about progress filling the pond. Mitch responded that the material fill is about a third complete. **Mike Livingston** recognized the significant amount of work completed by the small project team and partners over the summer.

Audrey Scott talked about Lower Toppenish Creek Habitat Restoration including the use of the TCCEP and reach assessment to prioritize projects and guide long-term restoration. The assessment combined field data, desktop analysis, hydraulic modeling, and reach-based ecosystem indicators to evaluate habitat conditions, connectivity, and risks across the project area. Values at risk identified are Middle Columbia steelhead, Pacific lamprey, terrestrial wildlife, migratory waterfowl and native plant species. The assessment was used to develop and rank restoration projects, with priorities expected to evolve as projects are implemented and new information becomes available. Implementation is anticipated to occur in phases over the next decade.

Final Thoughts: Workgroup Members

Workgroup members shared their gratitude for the presentations. Workgroup members expressed appreciation for the presentations and reflected on the progress being made across the Yakima Basin. **Scott Revell** was excited by the progress at Gold Creek, while **Adam Fyall** thanked Mitch for his report.

Jaclyn Hancock appreciated the focus on fish and habitat and thanked Andrew for addressing her questions. She also noted the importance of understanding the economic implications of this work for the state.

Charlie De la Chapelle thanked Andrew for his presentation and reflected on the progress made in addressing the thermal barrier, noting that it was a long shot but is now showing results. **Sean Gross** commented on the challenges of a fourth consecutive year of drought and late summer conditions for fish. He noted that the science presented by Andrew, together with Marci's presentation on star grass, highlighted the importance of temperature conditions. Despite the challenges of drought, he was encouraged to see the benefits of years of investment beginning to show positive results and emphasized the importance of continued investment.

Urban Eberhart highlighted the progress in habitat improvements throughout the Yakima Basin and credited the collaboration among partners for making that progress possible. He noted that, despite four consecutive years of drought, the group has developed the knowledge and partnerships needed to continue moving forward and achieve positive outcomes for fish and the basin. He also thanked all partners and Kittitas for their support.

Mike Livingston appreciated the lightning-round presentations and acknowledged Sage's presentation and the progress discussed.

Alex Conley reflected on ideas first discussed about 15 years ago and was encouraged by the optimistic presentations despite continued drought conditions. He noted improvements for steelhead and recognized the challenges facing agriculture, while expressing appreciation for what partners have accomplished through four difficult drought years.

Joe Blodgett thanked the presenters and emphasized the importance of continuing to work together, noting the positive future provided by the presentations.

Larry Mattson reflected on how frequently Gold Creek Pond was discussed when he first became involved in his professional career. He thanked Mitch and KCT, and Marci and Benton conservation district for the work that they have done and as two examples of NGO partners that they lean on in the basin to get work done.

Upcoming 2026 YRBWEP Workgroup Meetings:

- December 9: Yakima Valley College, Yakima

Attendance (*Denotes online participation)

Workgroup Members and Alternates:

Alex Conley, Yakama Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board
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
Jaclyn Hancock, Washington State Department of Agriculture
Jason McShane, Lower River Subgroup Co-Chair, Kennewick Irrigation District
Joe Blodgett, Yakama Nation Fisheries
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*
Mitch Long, Kittitas Conservation Trust
Sean Gross, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service
Seth Defoe, Kennewick Irrigation District*
Urban Eberhart, Outreach Committee Co-Chair, Kittitas Reclamation District

Other Attendees:

Andrew Matala, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Annie Byerley, WWCCD*
Audrey Scott
Ben Woodard, KID
Bruce Sully, Bureau of Reclamation
Bryan Horsburgh, HDR*
Chris Perra, Yakama Nation*
Chris Pitre*
Courtney Flatt*
Curt Strifert, Columbia Irrigation*
Cynthia Carlstad, Northwest Hydraulic Consultants

David Felman, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District*
David Lind, Wakish*
David Ortman*
David Reavill, DFW
Derya Sumer, HDR
Diani Taylor, Plauché & Carr*
Ed Lisowski, Washington State Department of Agriculture*
Everett Isaac, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Gina Hoff, Reclamation*
Glenn Grette, Kennewick Irrigation District*
Heather May, Washington State Department of Ecology*
Jean Mendoza, Friends of Toppenish Creek
Jeff Dermond, Ecology, OCR
Joel Hubble, Yakima Basin Joint Board of Irrigators
Jonathan Smith, Yakima County Development Association
John Crotty, Western Legal PLLC*
John Reeves, Save Lake Kachess*
John Stuhlmiller, Washington State Water Resources Association*
Julie Conley, ECY*
Justin Harter, NSID
Karin Bumbaco, Washington State Climate Office*
Keith Wolf, Yakima County*
Kelsey Green, Consultant, Yakima Basin Joint Board of Irrigation Districts
Kevin Eslinger, Kittitas Reclamation District*
Leif Krapas, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR
Lily Sadataki, HDR Engineering, Inc.*
Marcella Appel, Benton County Conservation District*
Michael Coffey*
Michael Horner, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR
Norman Semanko, Parsons Behle & Latimer*
Nuria Andreu, HDR
Paul Tabayoyon, APIC Yakima
Richard Visser, Consultant
Sarah Dyrdahl, American Rivers*
Scott Gun, ECY/OCR
Shaelyn Molvik, Ahtanum Irrigation District/ Union Gap Irrigation District
Shawna Warehime, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR*
Stuart Crane
Susan Woodward, American Rivers
Tim Poppleton, Washington State Department of Ecology, OCR*
Thomas Sexton, Benton County Conservation District*
Tom Tebb*
Travis Okelberry, Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District*
Trevor Hutton, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife
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.