

## Yakima Creeks Replenished: Yakima Integrated Plan Saves Steelhead Habitat

[water rushing]

**Walt:** In 2015, we kind of had a unique situation in the Yakima Basin. We had complete full reservoirs when the irrigation season started, but we didn't have snowpack. Usually we count on our snowpack as our sixth reservoir. It comes off in the summertime and gives us water.

**Dale:** That year, the snow we had melted very quickly. Normally, the streams of the East Slopes to the Cascades reach their annual lows around the end of August, first part of September. In that year, streams had exhausted their snow pack by the end of May.

**Walt:** And it impacted the tributaries that lead into the Yakima River more than anything. These tributaries that we count on flows were running dry early in the summer.

[water trickling]

**Urban:** But as the snow year continued to not materialize, the late snows did not come, we weren't able to get the water. The water wasn't showing up in the tributaries actually.

**Walt:** The biologists in the basin found, through surveys, that we were losing these streams. They were shrinking down into pools, we were losing juvenile fish, and alerted everybody to this situation.

**Urban:** The streams aren't running any water. We've never seen the streams run as low as they were.

**Walt:** We have the steelhead as a threatened species in the Yakima Basin. These steelhead primarily live in these small tributaries, the juveniles rear there. This brought the attention right away that we had a serious problem. We had a threatened species that we were beginning to lose in these tributaries.

[music]

**Urban:** When we realized how bad that it was, we were able to quickly get on the phone, and we were able to very quickly make decisions based on the relationships that we had with actually former adversaries and borrow water that was headed downstream for downstream uses.

**Dale:** These are relatively small creeks with minimum flows of a few cfs, and the KRD canal is relatively large with a capacity of several hundred cfs. So the KRD said, "Yeah. We can use some of our capacity in that canal to deliver these small but very biologically significant blocks of water to these tributaries." They watered those creeks up and that was a terrific thing.

**Walt:** One of the reasons this could happen so quickly, this solution that we found, was because of the Integrated Plan. These partners had been working together, the irrigation districts, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Department of Ecology, the Yakama Nation, the Bureau of Reclamation, the cities and counties, have all been working together. We had developed relationships and immediately phone calls were made, and we found some solutions where we could use KRD's infrastructure to actually deliver water to these tributaries and keep them alive.

[music]

**Urban:** We actually borrowed water out of the Yakima River, put it into our canal system, and then found ways to put in PVC pipe siphons into the canal, run the water over the road and down into those tributaries, and get that water flowing.

**Walt:** The irrigation system crosses all these tributaries, so it was something that we could do in a temporary, quick fashion is [to] take water out of the canal, put it in the tributaries, and run that water down to the main stem Yakima, and then deliver it to the irrigation district. It was kind of a win/win for everybody involved.

**Dale:** Now, we keep the streams live. They provide fish habitat, but they also provide habitat for food that fish in those creeks and downstream in the Yakima River eat. So it's a significant ecological improvement.

**Urban:** We were able to get the water to and water flowing through and save actually tens of thousands of threatened species because of this program. And it is all the result of the Integrated Plan.

**Walt:** For five years, we've been developing this plan. And here was a chance to actually, physically get together and make the plan work. This is a demonstration that we did, we pulled together and we physically did something. We were just not planning anymore, we're implementing the Integrated Plan.

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