



# Columbia County Board of Commissioners

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October 31, 2006

Dan Haller, Columbia River Unit Manager  
Water Resources Program  
Department of Ecology, Central Region Office  
Yakima, WA 98902-3452

RE: Comments on the Draft Voluntary Regional Agreement between Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association and Ecology

Dear Mr. Haller:

The Columbia County Board of Commissioners appreciates the Department of Ecology's consideration of our interests in reviewing and consulting on the Voluntary Regional Agreement (VRA) between the Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association (CSRIA) and the Department of Ecology. A tremendous amount of time and energy has been spent by citizens, agencies, Tribes and interest groups over the last 5-years developing a water management plan for Columbia County and its neighboring County, Walla Walla. This plan, WRIA 32 Watershed Management Plan was approved in June of 2005 and sets forth the priority areas and actions for improvements to watershed health for current and future generations. The plan addresses instream flow, water quantity, water quality and habitat and benefits greatly from commitments and support from those in our watershed.

Our watershed plan sets direction and priorities for our watershed. However, management of water resources at the larger scale, i.e., the Columbia and Snake River basins, has been very inflexible and difficult for water users and water conservationists to navigate. To address these issues, we believe that performance based management strategies be developed as an approach that will allow water users and regulators the opportunity to manage water resources to the mutual benefit of instream and out of stream uses. We find that the Columbia River Water Resources Management Program and this Draft VRA are both headed in a direction that could help to address the larger-scale water management challenges. Further we believe that RCW 90.90.030 and the Department, by seeking voluntary agreements for the purposes of providing new water for out-of-stream use, streamlining the application process, and protecting instream flow is a substantive step forward so long as the program is performance based.

We have the following comments for your consideration during the consultation period and are willing to meet with you to consult on these comments:

1. Identifying conservation projects that could be funded with revenue under the VRA must not be solely the responsibility of DOE and the CSRIA but also include Watershed Planning Units and Salmon Recovery Boards.
2. For implementation of any future conservation projects in Columbia County this legislative body will base its decisions on the recommendations developed by the Watershed Planning Unit and Snake River Salmon Recovery Board and strongly urge that DOE and the CSRIA likewise base its decisions on the local recommendations. Any such projects will be evaluated against the instream flow recommendations and pending rule set forth in the Watershed Plan and incorporated by reference in the Snake River Salmon Recovery Plan.
3. This legislative body will rely heavily on the Snake River Salmon Recovery Board and Watershed Planning unit for their review of conformance of this (CSRIA VRA) and any future proposed VRA's.

We thank you for your consideration of these comments and consultation and welcome more formal consultation if warranted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard W. Jones".

Richard W. Jones  
Chairman