



STATE OF WASHINGTON
Office of the Governor

November 19, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman, Senate Energy
& Natural Resources Committee
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Energy
Natural Resources Committee
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell:

On behalf of the State of Washington, I write to your committee in support of S. 1694, the *Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Phase III Act of 2015* (Act), introduced by Senator Cantwell. This Act exemplifies how the federal government can best support consensus-based, locally-driven and integrated water management solutions for drought stricken areas such as the Yakima Basin. It is critically important as we prepare for water resources to be further strained across the American West.

This legislation will help provide essential federal support for the ongoing partnership in the Yakima Basin involving a diverse set of stakeholders organized around common goals. The Act models the strategic and intentional collaboration needed to meet the basin's water needs, enhancing water supplies for irrigators, communities and endangered salmon and improving wildlife habitat. It builds on the accelerating efforts that have sprung from the first two phases of the water enhancement project. First in 1979, Congress passed YRBWEP Phase I legislation, in part to help address the brutal drought of 1977. Later in 1994, while representing Washington's Fourth Congressional District in Congress, I had the privilege of passing YRBWEP Phase II legislation to promote water conservation, water efficiency and habitat restoration in the basin. Now, following the development of a consensus-based Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, we are eager to partner with the federal government on the essential Phase III of the project.

Importantly, this Act will help provide drought relief to a local agricultural industry that generates \$3.2 billion in economic benefits annually. It will bolster water supplies that support the communities in the basin, and it will help ensure that there is sufficient water when chinook, coho, steelhead, bulltrout and sockeye need it most, respecting Yakama Nation Treaty Rights and bolstering millions in sport and commercial fishing in Central Washington and the Columbia River system.

The Act helps to achieve long-awaited fish passage projects at key reservoirs and will help ensure the resilience of the Yakima Basin to the stressors of climate change. It does this



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alongside an ongoing and deep commitment and investment by the citizens of Washington and local irrigators themselves, who will pay their fair share of infrastructure costs.

This Yakima Basin legislation illustrates beautifully how Washingtonians are tackling water supply problems, many dating to the 19th century, with 21st century solutions. We're happy to lead the way, as we often do from our corner of the country, in setting a national model for innovative, integrated watershed management. We greatly appreciate the tremendous leadership that Senator Cantwell has demonstrated in bringing this bill forward.

The timing is urgent, as our state has experienced an unprecedented year of drought, and we anticipate that such conditions may become the new norm. Thoughtful, prudent and creative solutions such as this must guide us as we move forward. We thank you for your consideration of this legislation, and we urge you and the full United States Senate to support the *Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Phase III Act of 2015*.

Very truly yours,



Jay Inslee
Governor

cc: The Honorable Patty Murray, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Dave Reichert, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Dan Newhouse, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Jennifer Gimbrel, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, U.S. Department of the Interior
The Honorable Estevan Lopez, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Department of the Interior
The Honorable Thomas Iseman, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, U.S. Department of the Interior
The Honorable Ann Mills, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture