



BUILDING A FUTURE FOR WATER, WILDLIFE AND WORKING LANDS

YAKIMA RIVER BASIN INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Water for Farms and Communities

The Problem

In the Yakima Basin, demand for water by existing users significantly exceeds supply in dry and drought years. This leads to required reductions in water use, referred to as “proration,” for junior water rights holders. If your water right is dated 1905 or later, you’re considered “junior” in the Yakima Basin. In a very dry year, junior water right holders can be cut off altogether. This is an impossible situation for an orchardist or a wine grape grower, not to mention community water supplies.



The problem is going to get worse. One recent study by researchers at the University of Washington, Washington State University, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, and the Climate Impacts Group found that drought frequency in the Yakima Basin will double in the next decade due to a declining snowpack in the mountains.

The Yakima Basin’s agricultural industry injects approximately \$3.2 billion into the State’s economy annually. Yakima County ranks 12th among all of the counties in the nation in terms of income derived from crop production. For farmers in the Yakima Basin, a drought year can be devastating. It can mean a loss of an entire year’s income, or in the case of perennial crops like apples, multiple years of lost income.

For communities with junior water rights, a drought can mean a reduction in water used for drinking, cooking, bathing, gardening or business use.

Addressing the Problem

The Yakima Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan addresses the problem by:

- Providing greater operational efficiency to existing water supply infrastructure.
- Increasing surface and groundwater supply.
- Implementing enhanced water conservation projects for communities and agriculture.
- Creating new water marketing and banking tools for trading water.

“A devastating drought can come at any time, impacting not just farming, but communities, business and the environment, including salmon. The Yakima Basin Integrated Water plan moves us dramatically closer to a winning solution that provides for everyone.”

- Dan Newhouse, farmer and Director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture





Benefits

Benefits provided by implementing the Integrated Plan include:

- A more reliable water supply to aid farmers in surviving dry and drought years.
- More water available for communities to meet their current and future needs.
- Greater efficiency in how water is delivered and used.
- More flexibility in trading water so that it is more easily delivered when and where it is most needed.
- Communities that are prepared to face the prospect of an increase in drought frequency and a reduction in snow-pack.
- Reduced tensions between a healthy farm economy and healthy salmon runs, creating more certainty for all.

About The Integrated Plan

After decades of fighting resulting in inaction, water users throughout the region put aside their differences to craft a water plan that meets everyone’s needs. The Integrated Plan provides water for agriculture, fish, and communities by:

- Modifying water system operation and infrastructure.
- Building fish passage at six existing dams.
- Implementing enhanced water conservation projects for agriculture and communities.
- Creating additional groundwater and surface storage capacity.
- Enhancing and protecting habitat .
- Employing water marketing and banking.

Support for the Integrated Plan

Support for the Integrated Plan is very broad, encompassing irrigators, conservationists, recreational organizations, business groups, Republican and Democratic party organizations, and tribal, local, state, and federal governments and agencies.



Photo courtesy of City of Yakima



Questions?

Please give us a call.

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