



## MANAGING WATER IN THE YAKIMA RIVER BASIN

In the Yakima River Basin, water is vital to our state's agricultural economy, our growing communities and businesses, and the fish and other wildlife that require a healthy river. However, the demand for water from the Yakima River has exceeded the supply since the early 1900s. After a century of fighting over water, basin leaders have adopted the Yakima River Integrated Water Plan, an agreement to advance all the water needs and interests together to meet the water needs of the basin, for today and tomorrow. The plan's importance cannot be overestimated. Consider the following:



The Yakima River historically supported a large number of **salmon**, with runs estimated between 300,000 to 960,000 fish a year in the late 1800s. These numbers have declined drastically, with some salmon species no longer present in the basin. The causes for the decline are many, including historic uses of water. Though salmon populations have grown in recent years, they are still well below historic levels. Further recovery of salmon will require better management of river flows and other fish habitat.

This region is a major contributor to Washington's \$40 billion **food and agriculture industry**. These industries in the basin alone produce more than \$1.75 billion in crops and \$1.5 billion in food processing sales while supporting more than 5,500 jobs. A reliable supply of water for irrigation is a critical requirement for these industries.

Water needs in the Yakima River Basin are expected to increase due to **population growth**. Preparing for population growth forecasts of 1.5 percent annually through 2024, and 1 percent annually from 2025 to 2060, will require finding new water supplies for city public water systems, new businesses and rural residential wells.

### WATER LIMITATIONS

The basin's water supplies are fully appropriated, and continue to fall short of the needs for fish and wildlife, dry-year irrigation and municipal water supplies. The significant deficit in water results in:

- » Insufficient water to meet the drought-year demands for irrigation.
  - » Uncertainty surrounding the availability of water for growing cities due to declining groundwater and surface waters.
  - » A reduction from historic levels in the number of salmon returning to spawn in the river.
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In addition, changes in runoff and stream flow patterns due to climate change will increase the need for prorationing and further shrink flows for fish.



## **DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Stakeholders in the Yakima River Basin have worked diligently since 2009 with the Department of Ecology and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to develop and approve an integrated water management plan to address these serious water resource problems. Elements of the plan include construction of fish passages at in-basin dams, habitat restoration, watershed protection, development of new surface water retention and groundwater storage, enhanced agricultural and municipal water conservation programs, and establishment of more effective water banking processes.

## **GOVERNOR GREGOIRE'S PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT THE INTEGRATED PLAN**

The Governor's proposed 2013–15 budget directs \$23.6 million in capital funds to invest in “early action” projects in the Yakima River Basin identified in the plan. This investment will help restore fisheries and meet agriculture, municipal and domestic needs in the basin.

The activities recommended for funding in the capital budget are:

### **Complete early action water supply projects (\$20.9 million)**

The Department of Ecology will restore main stem and tributary habitat, construct fish passage facilities, divert power to support salmon migration, increase Lake Cle Elum storage, pump water into reservoirs to improve in-stream flows, enlarge Bumping Lake, construct a pipeline to connect Lake Keechelus and Lake Kachess, modify the Lake Kachess reservoir and create a groundwater infiltration system.

### **Acquire water rights (\$2.0 million)**

The Department of Ecology will purchase existing senior water rights to provide seed water for establishing and operating basin water banks. Water banking is a mechanism used to facilitate legal transfer and market exchange of various types of surface, groundwater and storage entitlements. Setting up these banks will reduce barriers to completing water transfers and making water available for new uses.

### **Ensure successful implementation (\$700,000)**

The Department of Ecology, several state agencies and local governments will provide technical assistance to ensure that all projects and programs related to the Yakima River Basin are successfully coordinated and implemented.