



180 Nickerson St #202, Seattle WA 98109
206-378-0114 x308
www.sierraclub.org/habitat

April 27, 2015

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Yakima Plan – Federal Funding Concerns

Dear Senator Murray:

Thank you very much for your efforts in Congress to add 22,000 acres to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in the Snoqualmie watershed, as well as Wild and Scenic River designations for the Middle Fork Snoqualmie and Pratt Rivers.

On May 26, 2014, Sierra Club sent you a letter (attached) conveying our support for federal fish passage and water conservation funding in the Yakima River Basin. We noted that, “We believe that affordable solutions exist for meeting demands for water —both for fish and farmers—in the Yakima Basin that would respect the ecosystems, communities, and economic engines of the region and move to a more sustainable irrigation model.” Sierra Club supports funding for fish passage to help restore salmon to the Yakima River Basin. However, we do not support the current Yakima Plan, particularly because it funds the destruction of ESA critical habitat for Northern spotted owls and bull trout through expansion of Bumping Lake as well as destruction of important sage-grouse habitat through construction of Wymer Dam. The Water Research Center (WRC) report required by the State Legislature now confirms that a new Bumping Lake dam would return only 18 cents for every dollar spent, and the proposed Wymer dam would return only 9 cents for every dollar spent.

WRC Report, pages iii and iv.

http://swwrc.wsu.edu/documents/2014/12/ybip_bca_swwrc_dec2014.pdf

We are currently reviewing the DEIS for the Keechelus-Kachess portion of the Yakima Plan. Initially we have our concerns: according to the DEIS, “Bull trout will be adversely affected [in Keechelus tributaries] for approximately 115 days in 81 percent of years.” The DEIS also acknowledges that bull trout passage between Box Canyon Creek and Kachess Reservoir will be impeded due to habitat destruction (reduction of water flow) with resultant decline in population. We are concerned about loss of bull trout, which are protected by the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, the cost-benefit ratio for this portion of the plan is similarly low and given the potential environmental issues, causes us to further question whether this is appropriate stewardship of the public’s resources.

Sierra Club continues to support fish passage in line with the Yakama Nation’s vision of restoring the great salmon runs of central Washington. We continue to ask that you fund the completion of the Cle Elum fish passage along with moving towards fish passage at Keechelus and/or above the Tieton/Rimrock over the next decade. We request that you support inclusion of several rivers within the Yakima Basin in the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System. Among these are the Cle Elum River and its major tributaries the Waptus and Cooper Rivers. Also, the three forks of the Teanaway within the National Forest should be included.

We want to help farmers and orchardists in achieving the highest level of conservation possible. We recommend an additional \$85 million for water conservation and efficiencies within the first 10-year phase of Federal funding for the Yakima Plan. The calculation for water conservation under the integrated plan should be additional water conservation above the funding included in the current Yakima Plan to secure 10 million acre-feet of conserved water per year over the next decade. Water conservation “hard” targets and timelines should be adopted in the Yakima River Basin to ensure improved water efficiencies. Conservation and other demand-supply strategies should be pursued before turning to costly and environmentally destructive water projects such as new or expanded dams.

Thank you for your commitment and hard work on behalf of our environment. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss the Yakima Basin plan further with your office.

Sincerely,

Margie Van Cleve
Washington State Chapter Chair
Sierra Club