

News Release

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### **Senator Cantwell meets with Conservationists, Homeowners on controversial federal water legislation for Yakima Basin**

#### **Federal process leading to S. 1694 shut out nearly all conservation groups and impacted homeowners since 2009**

After six years of being excluded from the agency-led process that produced the Yakima Plan and S. 1694 introduced by Sen. Cantwell in June, conservation groups and impacted homeowners were able to meet with Sen. Cantwell in Ellensburg late Tuesday to discuss their concerns.

“We appreciate Sen. Cantwell’s willingness to start the discussion on some of these issues,” said Rick McGuire, representing the Alpine Lakes Protection Society (ALPS) and North Cascades Conservation Council. “For the first time in this six-year federal process, we were able to raise our concerns with a top elected official about the 2012 Yakima Plan and now S. 1694.”

In a [structured presentation](#), conservation groups and impacted homeowners reviewed areas of general agreement including fish passage, water conservation, and habitat restoration. They also highlighted for Sen. Cantwell concerns about the Plan’s \$5 billion costs, including the Legislature-requested [Washington Water Resource Center](#) economic analysis showing that proposed irrigation project costs far exceed benefits. Other concerns raised by the groups included the inability of proposed plans to supply water in multiple-year droughts, and concerns about privatizing the design and construction of new pumping facilities at Lake Kachess.

Although federally-mandated environmental reviews for dramatically lowering Lake Kachess to supply irrigation water are far from complete, Sen. Cantwell has moved forward with S. 1694 to authorize this and other irrigation projects. This has drawn a high level of concern partly because S. 1694 would allow the “K” projects to proceed forward without further Congressional review, and without completing federal environmental reviews. By opening the door of private funding for federal irrigation projects, S. 1694 would side-step further Congressional review that normally occurs

through the Congressional appropriations process, allowing the K projects to move forward.

“Careful scrutiny of these money-losing projects should make them non-starters,” said Jay Schwartz, an MBA with Friends of Lake Kachess who also submitted an [economic analysis](#) to Sen. Cantwell. “The basic environmental reviews are not done, preliminary economic analyses show big losses, environmental harm to Lake Kachess is severe, and so many people have been excluded from the process. We are encouraging Sen. Cantwell to slow the process down, and not try to authorize the full initial phase of the controversial Yakima Plan with its many economic and environmental problems.”

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, along with Washington State Department of Ecology’s Office of Columbia River, created and convened the “Yakima Work Group” in 2009, dominated by Yakima Basin irrigation interests. From the beginning, conservation groups and impacted homeowners have been excluded from the Yakima Work Group, and were not invited to testify at the July 7 U.S. Senate hearing on S. 1694. Concerns about the Yakima Work Group process resulting in the 2012 Yakima Plan were raised with Sen. Cantwell, including lack of compliance with federal laws on advisory committees.

Groups represented in the meeting with Sen. Cantwell were Alpine Lakes Protection Society (ALPS), Endangered Species Coalition, Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs, Friends of Bumping Lake, Friends of Lake Kachess, Kachess Community Association, Kachess Ridge Maintenance Association, Kittitas County Fire District #8, North Cascades Conservation Council, and the Seattle Audubon Society.

Links:

- [Presentation to Sen. Cantwell](#)
- [Table of Documents relating to S. 1694 provided to Sen. Cantwell](#)