

Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan

Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
BENTON, KITTITAS, KLIKITAT AND YAKIMA COUNTIES



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Pacific Northwest Region
Columbia-Cascades Area Office
Yakima, Washington



State of Washington
Department of Ecology
Central Regional Office
Yakima, Washington
Ecology Publication Number: 12-12-002

March 2012

Yakima Water Plan: A \$5 Billion Controversy

the good, bad, and ugly

Estella Leopold, PhD

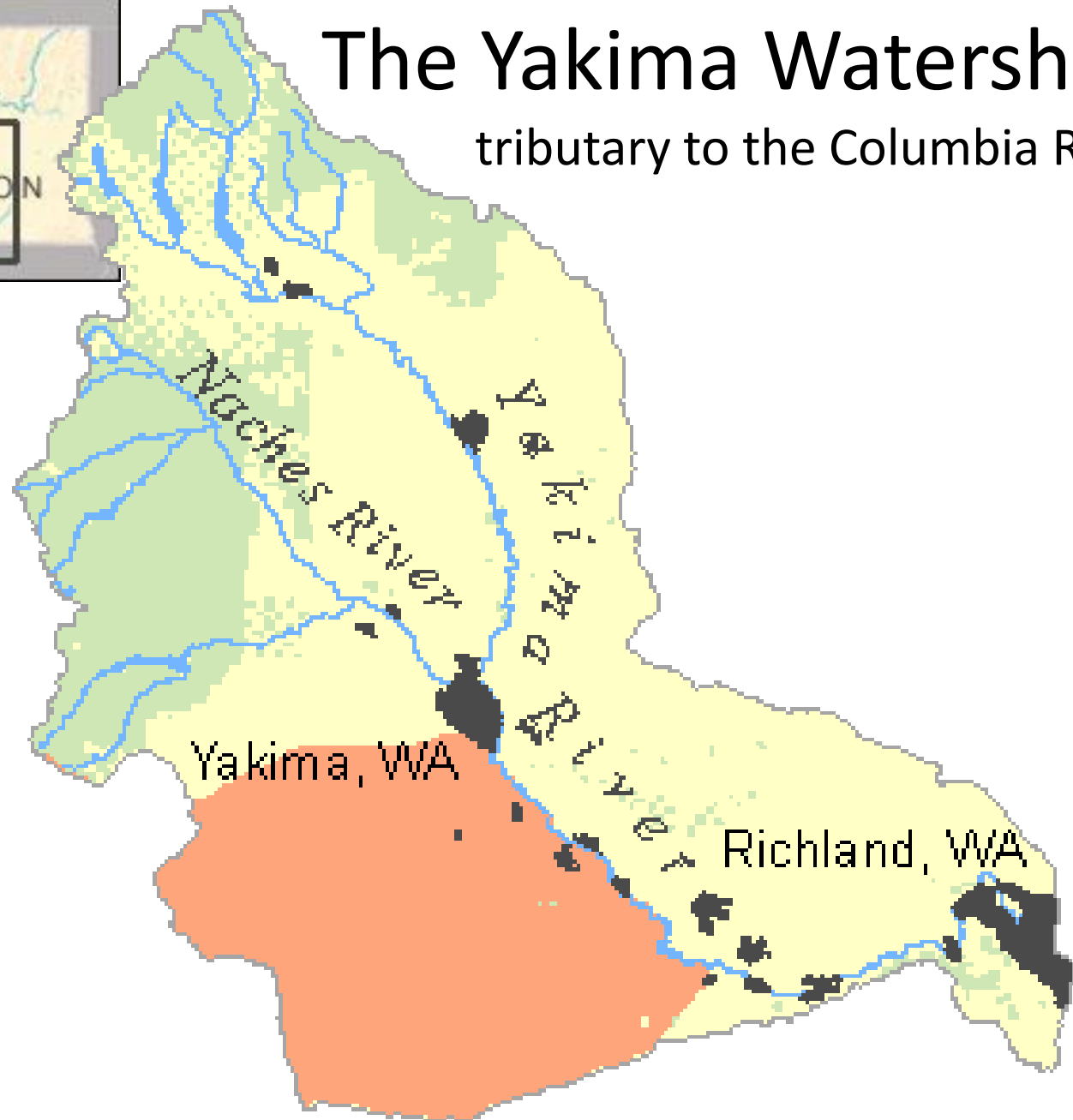
Sandhill Crane Festival

Othello, WA

March 24, 2012

The Yakima Watershed

tributary to the Columbia River



Yakima Basin Water Plan

Change Factors

- Junior irrigators want more water (and someone else to pay for the water)
- Tribes want passage for salmon at existing irrigation dams
- Climate change scientists:
 - water will become more scarce
 - water temperatures may increase – further risks to salmon.

“something for everyone”:

the good, bad, and ugly

- With several key factors coming together to do deals, the Yakima Basin Water Plan has “something for everyone”
- But what is in the Yakima Plan for the public?
 - Some is **good**
 - Some is **bad**
 - Some is **ugly**

Yakima Watershed: the way it used to be

Captain William Clark, October 17, 1805:

an Indian Showed me the mouth of the river [Yakima River] which falls in below a high hill on the Lard. N. 80° W. 8 miles from the Island [Bateman Island]. The river bending <Star> Lard.— This river is remarkably Clear and Crouded with Salmon in maney places, I observe in assending great numbers of Salmon *dead* on the Shores, floating on the water and in the Bottoms which can be seen at the debth of 20 feet. ...

- Rich salmon runs
- Homeland for many aboriginal bands and clans
- Wild forests and shrub steppe habitats supported diverse wildlife

All this would change in the blink of time's eye

Abundant Salmon



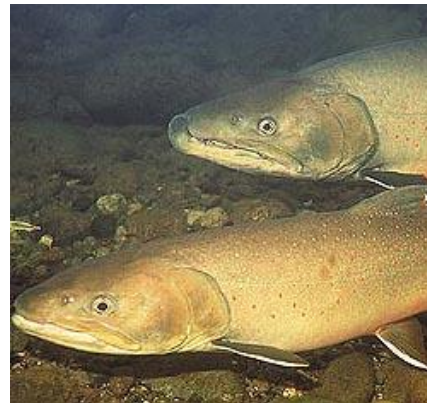
Chinook
salmon

Little Naches River

Traditional salmon preparation



Once-vast forests supported abundant and diverse wildlife



Ancient Forests,
Bumping Lake
near William O.
Douglas
Wilderness Area -
- home to Spotted
Owls and Bull
Trout, species
pushed toward
extinction

Shrub Steppe Habitat

Sharp-
tailed
Grouse



Federal dams built to supply water to artificial (irrigated) agriculture

- 5 federal irrigation dams
- Water used for tree fruit, wine grapes, wheat, hay
- Major ag export region
- Bottom Line: State issued too many water rights – not enough water.

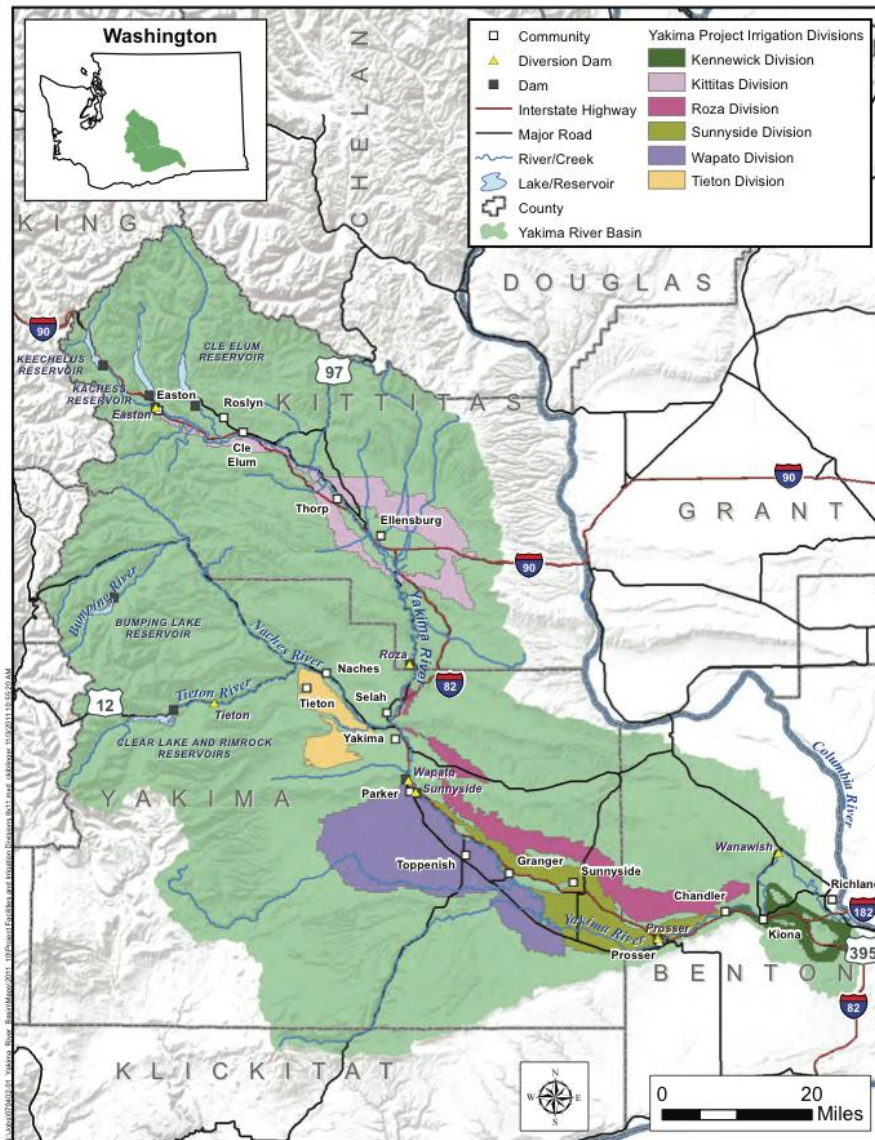
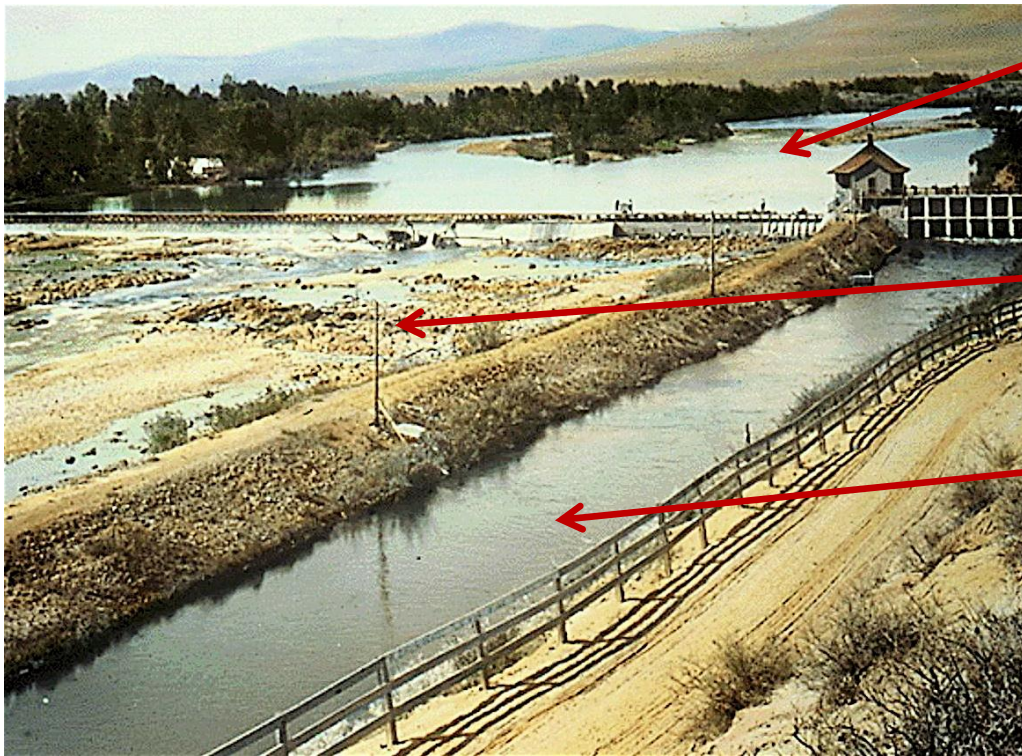


Figure 1-4. Yakima Project Irrigation Divisions

Irrigation dams devastate salmon

Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District dam diverting water from Yakima River, 1905.



Yakima River upstream
of dam

Yakima River
downstream of dam

Sunnyside Irrigation
District canal,
downstream of dam

Why the Yakima Water Plan?

Junior Water Right Holders



- “Juniors” knowingly planted fruit trees, crops that perish without water
- “First in time, first in right”: during drought, Junior water rights lose access
- Juniors water rights want taxpayers to build “insurance dams.”

Federally Subsidized Water to Grow . . . Hay?



Enormous amounts of federally-subsidized water is used to grow timothy hay, exported to Japan for racehorse feed.

30 years looking for “new” water

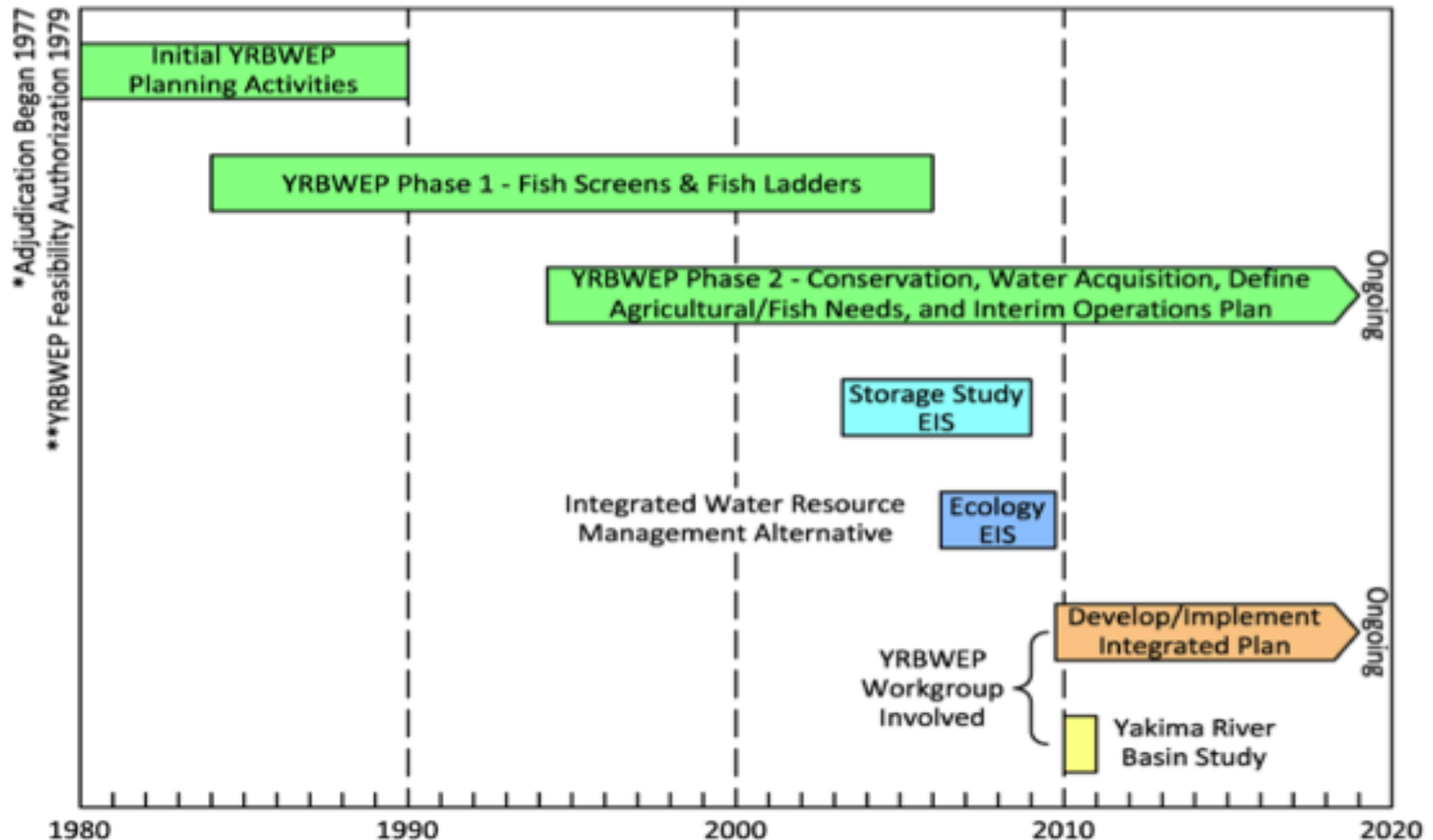
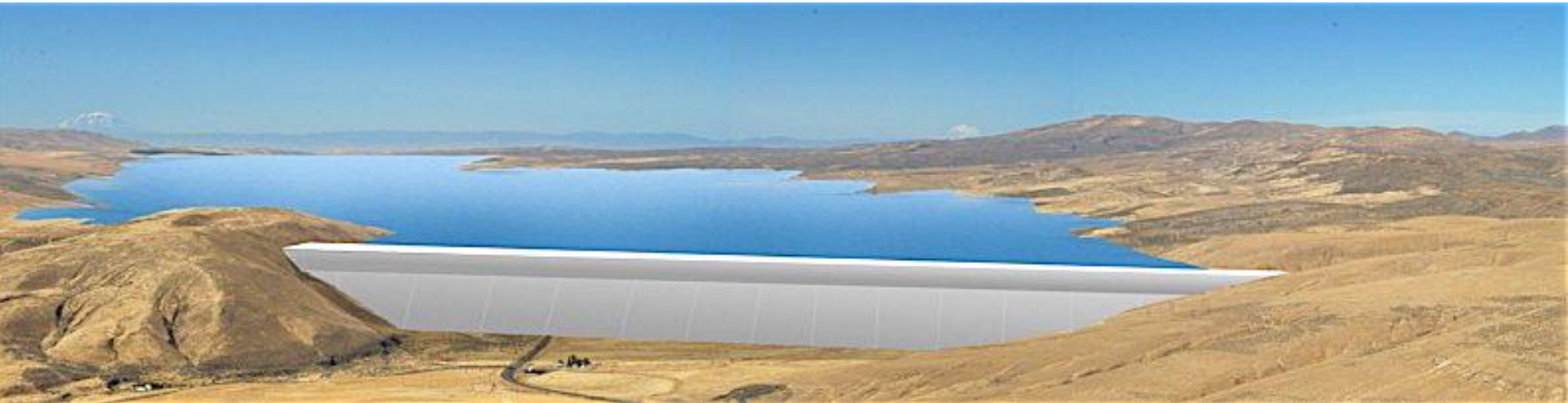


Figure 1-5 Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Timeline

1994 federal law:
**water conservation “planning” is required – but
not fully implemented**

- 1994 law: Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project
- Water conservation planning is required
- Plans never fully funded or implemented
- In 2012, USBR and Washington State study new irrigation insurance dams – but water conservation is voluntary.

Yakima Water Plan -- arising from the ashes of Black Rock Irrigation Dam



- Black Rock Dam - \$7 Billion irrigation dam
- 2008 USBR dam feasibility study: concluded new Yakima dams were uneconomic
- Dam proponents turned to Washington State
- Department of Ecology and USBR specially select Yakima Working Group – with a single conservation representative.

Sequence of Recent Developments

Citizen Participation Limited & Ignored

- Mar. 31, 2011 – Scientists letter re ORVs & public lands
- Nov. 16 – Draft EIS issued
- Jan. 3, 2012 – Public comment period closes
- Jan. 4 – Decision released on ORV NRA's
- Mar. 2 – Final EIS announced (no NRA analysis)
- Mar. 11 – 26 conservation groups issue letter opposing NRA ORV's on Wenatchee National Forest

Political Leaders Support New “Insurance” Dams

Rep. Doc Hastings

Sec’y of Interior Ken Salazar

Gov. Chris Gregoire



Sept. 18, 2011:
Political leaders
make impromptu
visit to Yakima --
one day after
Elwha dam
removal
ceremony --
to express
support for new
irrigation dams in
the Yakima basin.

USBR and WA State release Final EIS

March 2, 2012

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- EIS contains 2 alternatives (1) no action and (2) the proposed action – with no analysis of costs and benefits.
- Lobbying for tax dollars to implement Yakima Water Plan begins in Olympia and Washington DC

Good: Passage for Salmon

but already required by the Endangered Species Act

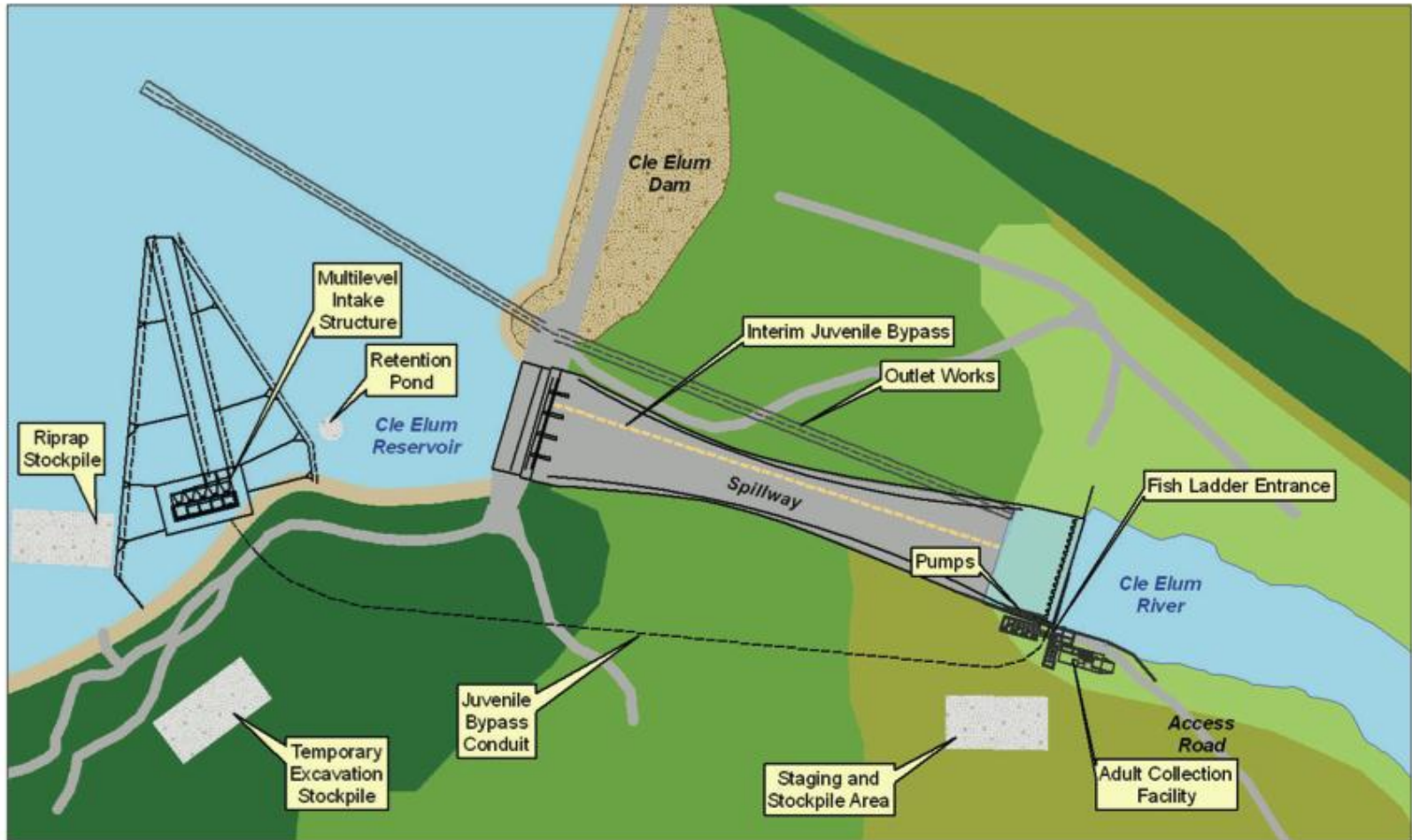


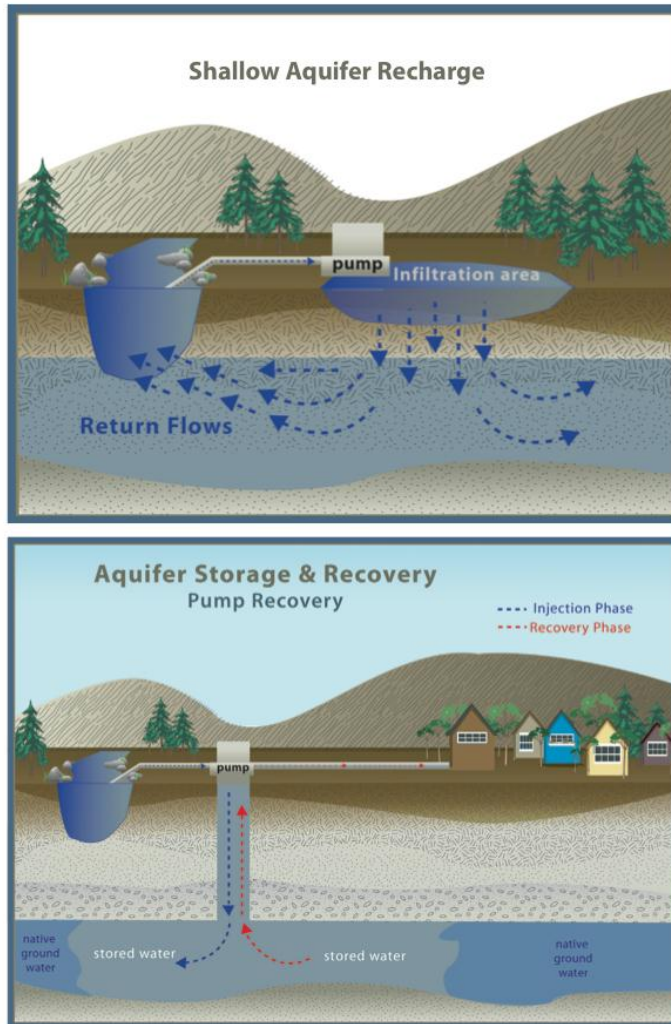
Figure 2-3. Proposed Cle Elum Dam Fish Passage Facilities

Good: using existing reservoirs to maximize water supply



Figure 1. Keechelus-to-Kachess Project Location
(Note: Figure 1 shows the project location outlined in white.
Figure 2 shows a more detailed aerial view of the pipeline alignment.)

Good: Aquifer Recharge



- Underground storage of water – when it works – is water and fiscally efficient

Figure 2-6. Groundwater Storage Proposals

Good: Recommends Wilderness additions, Wild & Scenic River designations

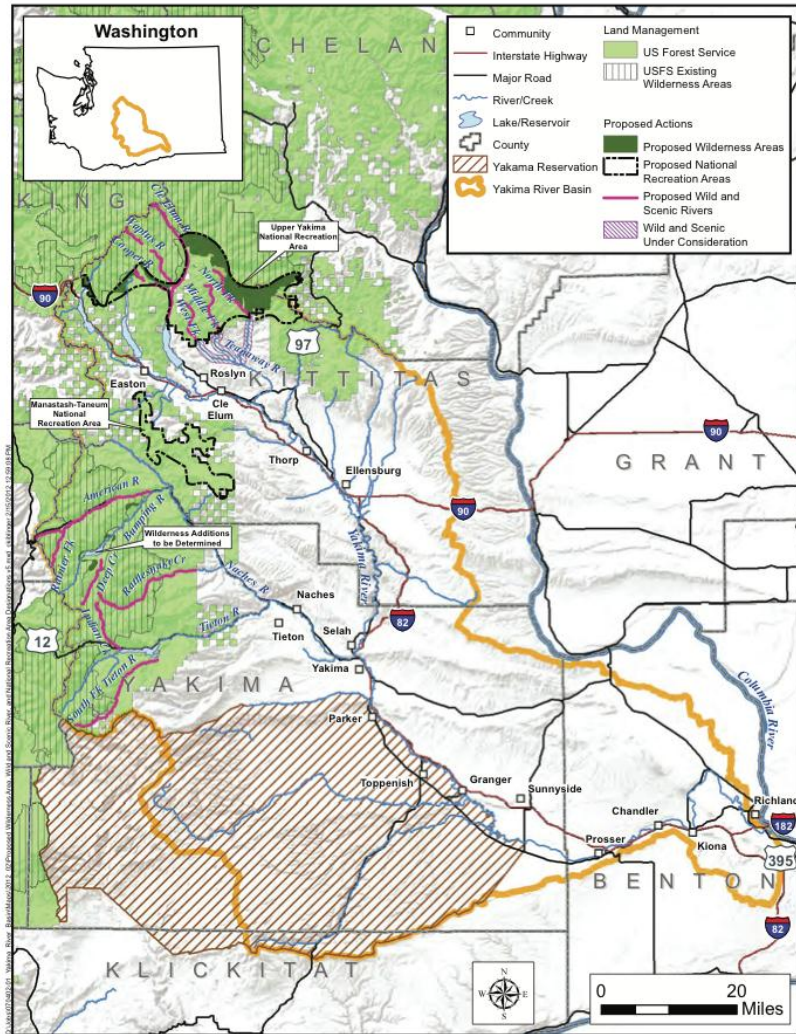


Figure 2-8. Proposed Wilderness, Wild and Scenic River and National Recreation Area Designations

Yakima Plan recommends wilderness additions (about 21,000 acres – but as part of the Upper Yakima National Recreation Area problematic with ORV use protection) and Wild & Scenic River corridors.

Bad: Inadequate Water Conservation



- 2009 study by WA Dept of Ecology identified 220 - 240,000 acre-feet of water savings through conservation
- 2012 Yakima Water Project concluded conservation is inadequate, and will only be voluntary.

The Ugly: New Irrigation Dams



Stumps in the “bathtub ring” at Bumping Lake – a new dam here would flood and destroy ancient forests.

Bumping Lake Dam

“insurance dam”



EIS proposes destroying a national treasure: Ancient Forests at Bumping Lake



The Ugly: Wymer Dam

another “insurance dam”

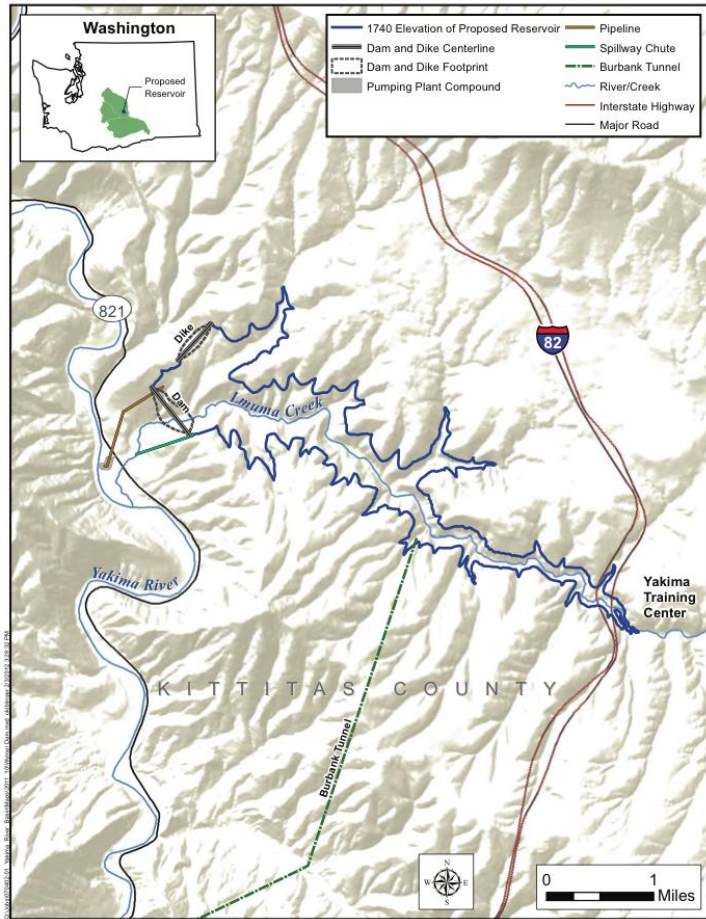


Figure 2-4. Proposed Wymer Dam and Reservoir



- EIS proposes dam in Lmuma Creek Canyon
- 2008 USBR analysis: Wymer fails cost-benefit test
- Would destroy valuable shrub steppe and dependent wildlife

The Ugly: ORV NRAs

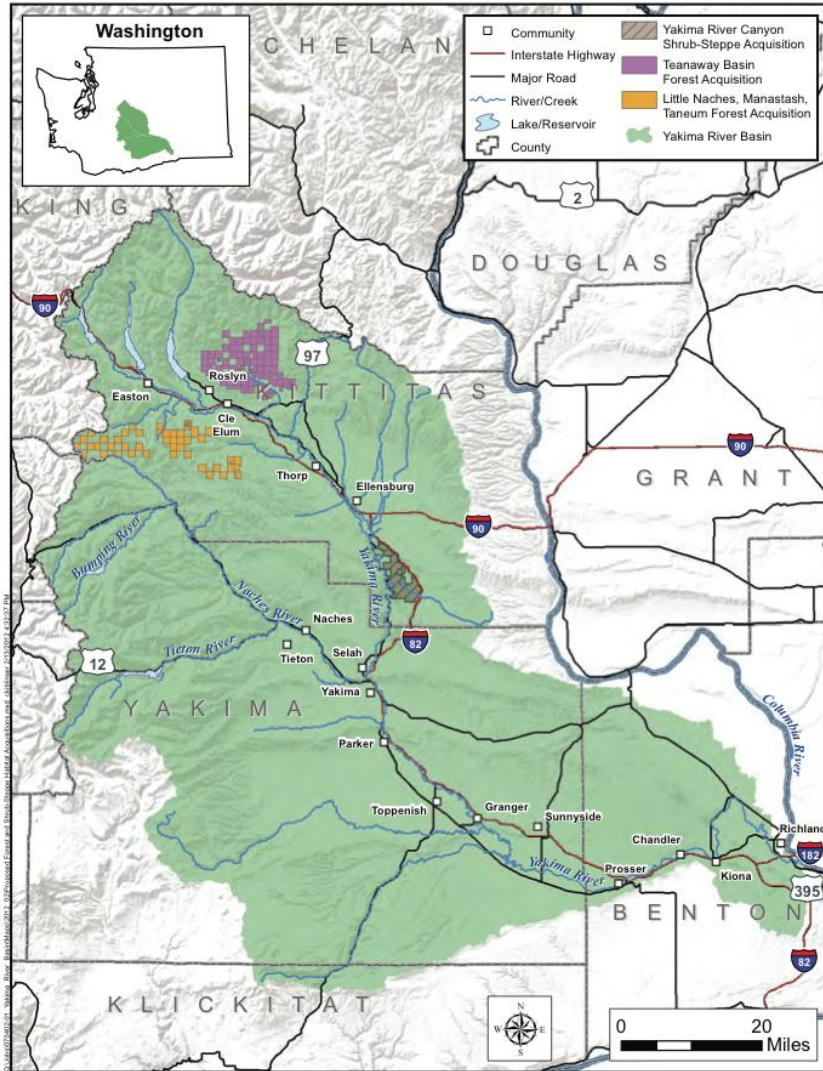


Figure 2-7. Proposed Forest and Shrub-Steppe Land Acquisitions

- Off-road vehicles given statutory protection in National Recreation Areas on Teanaway River headwaters forest
- Harm to fish and wildlife
- Very bad precedent for Wilderness Act legislation

The Ugly: Back Room Deals

- USBR and Washington State hand-picked participants for Yakima Working Group – including a single conservation group
- Meetings held without public notice, including agency officials
- Repeated violations of open government laws

Conclusion, part 1

What can we learn from the Yakima?

- Fish passage at the dams is already required under the ESA
- Lost habitat not worth the trade-off
 - 2,000 acres of ancient forest at Bumping Lake
 - Grouse habitat in Lmuma Creek (Wymer Dam)
 - Dedicated ORV use in Teanaway headwaters
- Why should the public spend billions to accomplish something that is already required?

Conclusion, part 2

Developing a Water Ethic

- Aggressive water conservation should be mandatory
- Appropriate crops should be grown
 - Especially where public subsidies to irrigators predominate, as in the Yakima
 - food security is an issue as climate change takes hold
- Honor treaties – protect and enhance wild salmon
- Water has political currency and economic value
- But how we use water is ultimately a moral decision and reflects societal values