July 27, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chair
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
United State Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Note to the Committee Clerk: Please copy all members of the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee and confirm.

RE: S. 1694 Yakima Plan

We have serious concerns about S. 1694, legislation that embraces the full Yakima Basin Plan and FEIS. We ask that the Committee not attach S. 1694 to the Energy Policy Modernization Act of 2015 as a vehicle for passage.

S. 1694 is a highly controversial bill that would cost $5 billion to implement, fails economic tests, and includes actions that are damaging to the environment. While we do see merit in certain elements of the Yakima Plan’s Phase 1, S. 1694 should be narrowed to address these specific actions that can benefit the watersheds, fisheries, and downstream uses without substantial cost to taxpayers.

On July 7, had we and other opponents of S. 1694 been given the opportunity to testify in your Committee’s hearing on the S. 1694, we would have conveyed these concerns to you and other members of your Committee. We encourage the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to fully deliberate on this bill, understand the costs to taxpayers, and the long-term implications for management of the nation’s lands and waters.

Our specific concerns about S. 1694 include that this legislation would:
• authorize water projects that have yet to be defined, including without full analysis of costs, determining who pays, and assessing environmental impacts;
• fail to incorporate a state-requested benefit-cost analysis that substantially challenged nearly 80% of the calculated benefits with no meaningful response from the Bureau of Reclamation http://swwrc.wsu.edu/2014ybip/;
• seek to proceed with the Kachess Drought Relief Pumping Plant or Keechelus Reservoir to Kachess Reservoir Conveyance projects with high potential for substantial community and environmental impact, conflicting and indefinite planning, and without a final EIS;
• Exempt the Yakima Work Group from the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) despite a record of the work group consistently excluding and ignoring those who oppose the Yakima Plan in contradiction to the intent of FACA principles;
• accept a flawed Yakima Plan Final Programmatic EIS (FPEIS) that considered only a single alternative rather than looking at affordable options (e.g., mechanisms to share water between senior and junior water right holders, conservation, water markets);
• authorize new irrigation projects including new irrigation dams at Bumping Lake and Lmuma Creek (Wymer Project) that would flood and destroy valuable wildlife habitat; and
• Add a new proposal for two new National Recreation Areas within the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest with 41,000 acres dedicated to off-road vehicle (ORV) – an element added to the Yakima Plan after the close of the public comment on the proposal.

Thousands of Washingtonians wrote letters opposing the Yakima Plan during the public comment period because of costs and environmental damage. While there are elements of this plan that have public interest merit and deserve support, we encourage you to oppose short-circuiting full deliberation on this bill by attaching it to the bipartisan energy bill.

Thank you,

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