



News Release

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Yakima Water Future: Sierra Club seeks changes in controversial bill

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Today the Sierra Club called on the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to make significant changes in a controversial water bill, [S. 1694](#). The draft legislation is proposed by the Yakima Workgroup and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau) and would authorize the controversial Yakima Integrated Water Management Plan (Yakima Plan) and enact the intent of Congress “that the Management Plan shall be implemented in its entirety.”

“We have serious concerns about the legislation statements that embrace the full Yakima Basin Plan and FEIS that incorporate actions that are damaging to the environment and don't meet economic tests for wise use of taxpayer funds,” said Dan Ritzman, the Sierra Club. “We do see a lot of merit to the Phase One elements that the legislation auspiciously intends to support. The legislation should be narrowed to address these specific actions that can benefit the watersheds, fisheries, and downstream uses.”

Specific concerns of the Sierra Club include that the Yakima Plan and S. 1694 as currently written would:

- exempt the Yakima Workgroup from the Federal Advisory Committee Act;
- accept a flawed Yakima Plan Final Programmatic EIS (FPEIS) that failed to consider a range of alternatives;
- seek to proceed with the Kachess Drought Relief Pumping Plant or Keechelus Reservoir to Kachess Reservoir Conveyance projects without a final EIS;
- fail to incorporate a state-requested benefit-cost analysis that would protect the federal taxpayer;
- continue to give priority to irrigation districts at the expense of the basin's depleted fisheries and in-stream flows; and
- authorize new irrigation projects including new irrigation dams at Bumping Lake and Lmuma Creek (Wymer Project) that the Sierra Club vigorously opposes.

The Sierra Club also expressed concerns that after the close of comments on the Yakima Plan's Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (DPEIS), the Yakima Workgroup added 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) use to the FPEIS. The Sierra Club strongly opposes this provision. Because this element of the Yakima Plan was added after the close of comments, the Sierra Club has requested that this element be deleted from the Yakima Plan.

The Yakima Plan is one of the Bureau's first efforts to jumpstart its WaterSMART program. The Bureau has previously testified before Congress that the federal agency is prepared to propose over a hundred new water storage projects throughout the West in response to climate change.

“We really do need to be WaterSMART and not WaterDUMB,” said John Osborn, a Spokane physician who coordinates Sierra Club's Columbia River Future Project. “The Yakima Plan is a bundle of sticks:

some of the sticks are in the public interest. But others, including some irrigation projects, are both environmentally destructive and money-losers. We need to unbundle the sticks and support individual elements that are in the public interest and affordable.”

The Sierra Club urges Congress to make sure that the Bureau promotes water conservation, water efficiencies, water banking, and water markets rather than wasteful water projects such as a new Bumping Lake Dam and Wymer Dam, or pumping water out of the Columbia River that are not cost-effective, have negative benefit-cost ratios, and drown endangered species habitat.

Link -

- [Sierra Club testimony](#)
- [S. 1694](#)