

Yakima Basin Integrated Plan

Historical timeline of events from conflict to collaboration on water management in the Yakima River Basin



Since time immemorial the indigenous people now known as the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the **Yakama Nation** lived in the Yakima Basin and relied upon the land and water for fishing, hunting, and gathering of roots and

berries. Salmon and steelhead returned the basin annually in numbers estimated at 800,000 to 1 million.

Time Immemorial

Treaty of 1855

1855

Signing of the **Yakama Treaty of 1855** between the U.S. and the Yakama Nation opens the basin to immigrant settlement, while retaining indigenous rights to traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering grounds.

Diversions from the Yakima River create an agricultural economy. Early construction of timber crib dams at **Lake Cle Elum, Lake Keechelus, and Lake Kachess** led to loss of spawning habitat and contributed to extirpation of sockeye runs.

1860
to
1900

Early dam construction & agricultural development

Reclamation Yakima Project

1905

Construction of reservoirs and canals for the federal Reclamation Service's Yakima Project commences, continuing over the next 30 years. The agricultural economy expands. Reclamation Service reserves all unappropriated surface water in the basin.



Construction of a dam at **Bumping Lake** blocks fish passage, resulting in the demise of the last sockeye salmon run in the Yakima Basin. Decades of water infrastructure development, as well as by industrial fishing, logging, habitat loss and construction of dams on the Columbia River, take their toll on salmon runs.

1910

Salmon runs decimated

Severe droughts, water conflicts lead to 1945 consent decree

1929
to
1945

From 1929 to 1931 a severe drought impacted the Yakima Valley, affecting agriculture. In 1941, drought leads to litigation establishing irrigation water delivery priority under the **1945 Yakima Basin Consent Decree**. Water supplies developed by the Reclamation projects are prorated - reduced - during water short years.



On February 12, 1974, Federal Judge George Boldt issues an historic ruling reaffirming the rights of Washington’s Indian tribes to fish in accustomed places and establishes the Tribes as co-managers of the fisheries.

The “Boldt Decision” allocates 50 percent of the annual catch to treaty tribes, which leads to conflict among tribal members and other fishermen.

1974

Boldt Decision affirms tribal fishing rights in Washington

Surface water adjudication

1977

A severe drought triggers long-running litigation to establish all surface water use priorities in the basin, including the Yakama Nation’s right to water for fisheries, in a case known as *Ecology v James Acquavella*.

Congress directs the federal Bureau of Reclamation to work with the state of Washington and develop a plan to meet the needs of irrigation, treaty rights, and aquatic life. They implement the **Yakima River Basin Watershed Enhancement Program (YRBWEP)**. A court decision requires formation of a committee to advise Reclamation on **protecting the fishery resources**.

1979
to
1980

Yakima River Watershed Enhancement Program

Fish passage authorized & fish reintroduction begins

1984
to
1985

Congress authorizes the design, construction, and maintenance of fish passage facilities within the Yakima River Basin, as Phase I of YRBWEP.



Yakama Nation begins reintroduction of Coho salmon, which went extinct in the basin in the early-1980s.

Salmon and steelhead populations decrease to a historic low of a few thousand returning fish. Fish ladders and screens are completed at 16 large diversions and canals in the basin, not including the Bureau of Reclamation’s five main storage reservoirs.

1990
to
1992

Steelhead populations at historic lows; fish screens & ladders introduced

Drought years again impact water supplies, fuel distrust

1992
to
1994

A three-year drought hits, with 1994 proratable water supplies as low as 37% of the full delivery. Shortages increase conflict over water.



Congress authorizes Phase II of YRBWEP, which initiates irrigation water conservation and instream flow projects to support fisheries. As much as \$300 Million is authorized for projects and water acquisitions.

1994

YRBWEP II water conservation & streamflow projects

Initial watershed planning

1997

Despite long-term efforts, regionally led watershed planning fails to find equitable solutions for water management, fisheries, and habitat restoration.

Bull trout and Mid-Columbia River steelhead are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act

1999

Bull trout & steelhead listed as threatened

State halts issuing new water permits without mitigation

1999

In a settlement of groundwater withdrawals litigation, the Washington Department of Ecology halts permits for new non-mitigated water uses and agrees to manage water supplies conservatively in consultation with the Yakama Nation and Bureau of Reclamation. This triggers animosity among county & non-tribal water users.

2001 & 2005: Drought reduces proratable irrigation deliveries to lows of 37% and 42% respectively.
2003: Bureau of Reclamation initiates a study to evaluate construction of the Black Rock Reservoir to provide water for proratable irrigators.

2001
to
2005

More droughts prompt study of Black Rock Reservoir

Fish passage at storage dams

2005

Under a court settlement agreement, Reclamation begins assessing fish passage at Reclamation's main storage dams.

Historic adversaries, the Yakama Nation and Roza Irrigation District jointly reject the Black Rock Reservoir project and outline an integrated water management approach that becomes the foundation for the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (YBIP).

2008

Yakamas, Roza irrigators seek new approach to water management

Work group hammers out details of integrated plan

2009
to
2011

A diverse body of leaders work on a plan to address water shortages and restore natural ecological functions in the Yakima River Basin. The YBIP work group unanimously votes to support the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan.





Yakama Nation reintroduces sockeye to the Cle Elum Reservoir. Some Yakima salmon runs improve, due in part to basin work to improve habitat, flows and passage.

2009
to
2014

Yakama Nation reintroduces sockeye to the Cle Elum Reservoir

State adopts Integrated Water Management

2013

Washington State's legislature authorizes the Integrated Plan. Implementation begins on projects not needing new federal legislation.

A snowpack drought consistent with climate change projections hits Yakima Basin, impacting water supplies and raising water temps for fish. Proratable irrigators receive only 47% of normal water allocation despite near normal precipitation.

2015

Snowpack drought

Cle Elum fish passage construction begins

2015

Construction begins on fish passage at Cle Elum Reservoir, the first fish passage on a main Reclamation reservoir in the Yakima.



In February 2019, federal legislation endorses YBIP as Phase III of YRBWEP and provides additional authorization needed for YBIP's first set of projects -- the Initial Development Phase. Project build-out through 2029.

2019

Congress authorizes plan's first-phase projects

Yakima Adjudication of water rights final decree

2019

In June 2019, a final decree is issued for the long running *Ecology v James Acquavella* surface water rights adjudication that establishes priority of water use in the Yakima River basin, beginning with the time immemorial water right to support fisheries held by the Yakama Nation.

Integrated Plan working group evolves to include numerous subcommittees to address ecological & water supply issues, and begins focused approach to solving problems in the lower reaches to the mouth of the Columbia, planning for future phases of implementation.

2020
to
2021

Lower River Project evaluation

Anticipated completion of initial development phase

2029

Projected completion of projects identified in first phase of Integrated Plan, including fish passage, water conservation, water banking, bull trout, salmon & steelhead recovery.