



Kittitas County Conservation District

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October 5, 2006

Mark Walker, Director of Public Affairs
Northwest Power and Conservation Council
851 S.W. Sixth Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, OR 97204

RE: Comments

Mr. Walker:

The Kittitas County Conservation District offers the following comments regarding the application for the Yakima Tributary Access and Habitat Program (YTAHP), Project Number 200203. YTAHP's application requested \$3,167,800 for the FY 07-09 funding cycle.

YTAHP is a valuable and important program that must be continued in the Yakima Basin if the tributaries to the Yakima River are to be safe for and accessible to fish (including ESA listed species). YTAHP is currently working with individual water right holders to provide fish screens at irrigation water diversions, to correct fish passage barriers created by diversion structures, and to improve habitat (riparian and in-stream) in tributaries of the Yakima River.

YTAHP has worked primarily in our County and in northern Yakima County. In our county, YTAHP has allowed us the time and resources to work cooperatively with the water right holders to design projects that benefit both the fish and the landowners. YTAHP was initiated in response to the requests for assistance from landowners who understood and wanted to address potential liability under ESA after the listing of summer steelhead in the Mid-Columbia. From that beginning, YTAHP has grown into a program that is able to improve conditions for fish, while building trust and partnerships with private landowners by working closely with the landowners to design projects that fit their specific situation. Projects include: fish screens and fish passage facilities, improvements to irrigation systems to save water and reduce erosion (and sediment input to streams) and riparian habitat improvements.

Major components of YTAHP are the stream assessments and the Tributary Teams. In our county alone, we have completed 132 miles of stream assessment and inventoried 177 barriers to fish passage and 183 unscreened surface water diversions. Each assessment is summarized in a report that is presented to the Trib Team. The landowners and water right holders are the core of each Trib Team. Involving them in the decision making process encourages a high level of ownership and an understanding of the program. Our local landowners are looking to this program for both technical and financial assistance.

Using the funds provided by the Bonneville Power Administration, we have leveraged additional funds to complete projects. In our district alone, we have leveraged over \$2 million from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, Department of Ecology, Washington

Conservation Commission, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Without YTAHP much of this funding would have been unreachable resulting in fewer successful projects.

At this time, the draft recommendation of the Council is that YTAHP is fundable (qualified) for FY07-FY09 at approximately 44% of the requested amount. This would severely decrease the effectiveness of the program. We have dozens of projects on the horizon that would be delayed or deferred entirely if YTAHP funding was cut. There are landowners and irrigators depending on our assistance and continuation of this program. There is also habitat that will remain unavailable to the fish for spawning and rearing habitat if this program is reduced.

In summary, we strongly urge the Northwest Power & Conservation Council to fully fund YTAHP. A great partnership and program has been built and needs to be maintained. It is important to the fish resources, the landowners and our community.

Respectfully submitted,



Anna Lael
District Manager

Cc: South Central RC&D
Chair David Bowen, Kittitas Board of County Commissioners
Representative Bill Hinkle, 13th District
U.S. Representative Doc Hastings
U.S. Senator Patty Murray