

Schaake Habitat Improvement Project

The intent of the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project (YRBWEP) is to evaluate and implement cost-effective structural and nonstructural measures that have a strong Federal interest to increase the reliability of the irrigation water supply and enhance stream flows and fish passage for anadromous fish in the Yakima River Basin. Facility modifications, implementation of diversion reduction measures, the purchase or lease of land, water, or water rights from willing sellers for habitat improvements, habitat restoration, and changes in operations, management, and administration may be implemented to reduce the demand on the available water supply.

Legislative History

- a. P.L. 96-162 Feasibility Study, December 28, 1979;
- b. P.L. 98-381 Section 109 of Hoover Power Plant Act of 1984, August 17, 1984; and
- c. P.L. 103-434 Title XII Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project, October 31, 1994, as amended by P.L. 105-62, October 13, 1997, and P.L. 106-372, October 27, 2000

The United States, through Reclamation, has acquired water rights and purchased nine properties (with water rights) totaling 1,820 acres, under its YRBWEP authority and is working with the Yakama Nation, other Federal agencies, non-profit organizations and State and local governments on enhanced stream flows and improved habitat for fish and wildlife through revegetation projects, levee setbacks, and side channel habitat restoration.

Reclamation is actively managing and implementing restoration projects on these properties. The largest of these projects is the Schaake Habitat Improvement Project (Project) located on a 285-acre parcel of land purchased in 2003 for this purpose. The property lies southwest of the City and was formerly a cattle feedlot and packing house. The infrastructure associated with this business was removed following Reclamation's purchase of the property, with the exception of a pump house that still remains. One of the largest floodplain restoration projects in the Yakima River Basin is currently being implemented on this site, which includes construction of side channels and removal of the existing levee. A flood protection berm was constructed in an alignment away from the river.

The Project involves multiple stakeholders including the City and Twin City Foods (TCF), a quick-frozen vegetable processing company doing business in Ellensburg, WA. TCF is one of the largest employers in Kittitas County and leases several agricultural fields from the City that lie within and adjacent to the Project. Also within the Project area is the City's wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) and their treatment outfall.

The Project is anticipated to allow the Yakima River to access additional floodplain, some of which is owned by the City and leased to TCF, for the purpose of ecological restoration. There will be changes to the extent and timing of flooding associated with the Project in certain fields utilized by TCF. Due to these changes it may be beneficial to all parties to implement a land

exchange between the United States and the City. This would allow TCF to move operations from fields south of the existing levee to fields protected by the proposed levee and would transfer floodplain to the United States for project purposes.

Reclamation and the City are currently implementing the land exchange and are working closely with TCF on relocation. The area included in the exchange includes approximately equal acreage areas of City of Ellensburg and United States property for this purpose. The United States property includes a 100' buffer along Wilson Creek and an easement for Kittitas PUD powerlines along the east side of the new levee. Following the exchange, approximately 74 acres of this property would be available to TCF for agricultural use.

Completing the proposed land exchange would allow TCF to move some operations from areas that are currently unprotected by a levee to a larger, lower flood risk area that will be protected by the new levee. The additional acreage would give TCF more operational flexibility and in addition the City would have the ability to expand the WWTP in the future should the need arise.

With the exchange Reclamation will be able to complete an important restoration project for the Yakima Basin that will increase floodplain resiliency and function, decrease flood severity, and improve aquatic, riparian and upland habitat while supporting TCF and the City to assist in the recovery of ESA-listed steelhead.

A Boundary Line Adjustment (BLA) will be needed to complete the exchange.