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**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
COUNTY OF KITTITAS  
STATE OF WASHINGTON**

**RESOLUTION**

**NO.: 2015- 121**

**Support for S.1694 - Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Phase III Act of 2015**

WHEREAS the Yakima River Basin is one of the most productive agricultural industries in the nation, contributing approximately \$3.2 billion to the state of Washington's annual economy;

WHEREAS the Yakima Basin was historically home to one of the largest salmon populations in the Columbia Basin, second only to the Snake River in fisheries production, and has the potential, with proper conservation action, to support 300,000 salmon and steelhead, and the largest sockeye run in the lower 48;

WHEREAS the Yakima River Basin is affected by a variety of water resource constraints that adversely impact ecosystem functions for endangered fish and other aquatic species, and water supply for agriculture, municipal and domestic uses;

WHEREAS obstructions, changes in water temperatures, other obstructions and inadequate stream flow block fish passage to Yakima tributaries and spawning grounds, affect flows for smolt outmigration and rearing habitat for juvenile salmonids;

WHEREAS demand for irrigation water cannot always be met in years with below-average runoff, leading to reduced (pro-rated) irrigation water for junior water-right holders that in turn reduces farm and related income, and puts the basin's perennial crops at extreme risk;

WHEREAS six drought years severely impacting the basin economy, ecosystem functions and reservoirs, have occurred since the 1990s, the most recent being the present year, with climate change models indicating that decreased snowpack and higher temperatures will be the norm throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century;

WHEREAS the Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan represents a balanced package of actions rooted in 30 years of collaboration, negotiation, and compromise among diverse stakeholders in the Yakima basin including local irrigators, county commissioners, the Yakama Nation, the City of Yakima, the Governor's office, Washington State Department of Ecology, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the conservation community, and others;

WHEREAS the goals of the Integrated Plan as endorsed by S. 1694 are to improve the reliability of water supply for irrigation, municipal supply and domestic uses; and to protect, mitigate and enhance fish and wildlife habitat; provide increased operational flexibility to manage in-stream flows to meet ecological objectives;

WHEREAS the Integrated Plan has thus far achieved several key successes furthering these goals, including the design and implementation of efficiencies throughout Yakima basin irrigation districts, the diversion of irrigation flows into threatened Yakima River tributaries, the successful acquisition of grant funding for floodplain restoration, and the purchase of 50,000 acres of community forest;

WHEREAS the S.1694 builds on two previous Yakima River water management Acts and provides authorization and funding for the Initial Development Phase of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan;

WHEREAS the Initial Development Phase put forward by S. 1694 authorizes projects of immediate importance to addressing the aforementioned challenges and opportunities, including fish passage, accessing reservoir storage, habitat restoration and increased water market efficiencies;

WHEREAS the Integrated Plan also includes an adaptive management framework to address potential future changes in water needs or hydrology, including potential climate change effects;

WHEREAS our economic vitality, the health of our lands, quality of life, agriculture, fisheries, thriving wildlife populations and diverse, world-class recreational opportunities are dependent on the Yakima Basin's clean, cold water;

WHEREAS without decisive legislative action we will leave neither a stronger economy nor a more resilient environment as a legacy to the next generation;

WHEREAS the Washington State legislature has committed a \$160 million investment toward a more secure environmental and economic future for the Yakima Basin through their support of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that we, the Kittitas County Board of Commissioners commemorate our support for an equally strong investment by the federal government through passage and funding of the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Phase III Act of 2015 (S. 1694).


THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we urge Congress and our elected officials to act, and to act in implementing S. 1694, including associated environmental reviews, technical analyses, refinements to specific actions, project designs and program development/implementation, and project permitting and construction.

DATED this 1<sup>st</sup> day of September, 2015 at Ellensburg, Washington.

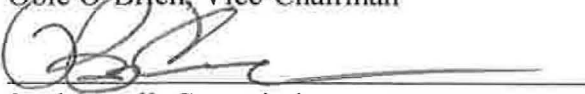
**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
KITITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

  
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Gary Berndt, Chairman

  
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Obie O'Brien, Vice-Chairman

  
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Paul Jewell, Commissioner



**CLERK OF THE BOARD**

  
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Julie A. Kjorsvik



Kittitas County, Washington  
**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

District One  
Paul Jewell

District Two  
Gary Berndt

District Three  
Obie O'Brien

August 20, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chairman  
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
304 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member  
304 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell:

We write to you today in support of S. 1694, the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Phase III Act of 2015. This legislation, and the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan on which it is modeled, represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure the region's environmental and economic health.

S. 1694 was developed by a diverse group of stakeholders to meet serious challenges emerging within the Yakima River Basin, challenges that will only worsen with time and the projected impacts of climate change. The risk of recurring droughts and inadequate water supplies endanger not only threatened fisheries and pristine habitats, but the livelihoods of local farmers, the culture of the Yakama Nation, and the solvency of an agricultural region that contributes \$3.2 billion annually to the economy of Washington State. S. 1694 and the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan address these concerns through a balanced approach to ensure reliable water supply, provide fish passage, improve streamflows and enhance habitat restoration. The legislation will authorize the most urgently needed projects to address these needs, including:

- Construction of the Kachess Reservoir Drought Relief Pumping Plant, which will allot an additional 200,000 acre-feet of water to farmers in drought years, and its companion project, the Keechelus-to-Kachees pipeline, which will balance water levels between the two reservoirs. These projects will be financed by water users, not state taxpayers;
- Irrigation efficiencies that will conserve 85,000 acre-feet of water for in-stream flows annually;
- Groundwater storage projects that provide cooler, regular flows for recovering fish populations;

- Installing fish passage at Cle Elum and Tieton dams, restoring access to pristine habitat and spawning grounds for reintroduced, historically extirpated salmonid species;
- Wild and Scenic River designation to protect those habitats; and
- Habitat and floodplain restoration throughout the Yakima River Basin, removing obstructions and protecting properties from future flood risks.

These projects are the result of decades of give-and-take between historically contentious groups: irrigators, farmers, conservationists, and state, federal, municipal and tribal governments. By setting aside long-standing conflicts to collaborate on solutions, the authors of the Integrated Plan have provided an adaptive framework that truly considers and negotiates between the basin's complex water needs. In many ways, the strength of the plan lies in its diversity, adaptability and the cooperation it has brought to the region.

We join these groups in asking for your full consideration and support of the Act, and look forward to its success. Together, we support continuing a balanced, thoughtful, adaptive approach to managing water for farms, families, fish and wildlife.

Sincerely,

THE KITTITAS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Gary Berndt, Chairman

  
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Obie O'Brien, Vice-Chairman

  
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Paul Jewell, Commissioner