

City letterhead

Date

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 \$4.5 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 and its companion project, the Keechelus-to-Kachees pipeline, which will allow access to an additional 200,000 acre-feet of stored water and balance water levels between the two reservoirs. These projects will be financed by water users, not state taxpayers;
- Irrigation efficiencies that conserve 85,000 acre-feet of water for in-stream flows annually;
- Groundwater storage projects that provide cooler, regular flows for aquatic wildlife and provide an alternate source for municipalities;
- 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.

The City of Yakima proudly supports S. 1694 and the Integrated Plan for the sake of the farmers, families, fish and wildlife relying on cold, clean water, and we call on our elected state and federal officials to do so as well. The city will be monitoring the progress of S. 1694 as it moves through the legislature and will be making comments proposed modifications. Although there's much work yet to be done and details to be discussed, we look forward to continued collaborative efforts to evaluate and implement the Plan.

Sincerely,

Tony O'Rourke  
City Manager