

For Immediate Release
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Yakima River Basin Legislation Passes Senate

Senator Maria Cantwell's legislation to provide sustainable water supplies to the Yakima Basin passes as part of the Energy Bill

WASHINGTON D.C. – Today a precedent-setting strategy to ensure sustainable water supply for Yakima Basin farms, fish, and communities, along with other fisheries restoration measures, successfully passed through the U.S. Senate as part of a bipartisan Energy Bill.

On April 19, S. 1694, the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Act Phase III of 2015, was unanimously amended to the Energy Policy Modernization Act, authored by Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chair Lisa Murkoswki (R-AK) and ranking member Maria Cantwell (D-WA).

Senator Cantwell introduced S. 1694 last June, cosponsored by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA). The legislation builds on two previous Yakima River water management laws, the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Phase I and Phase II Acts of 1979 and 1994, which respectively authorized funding for fish passage and habitat restoration and water conservation projects. Senator Cantwell's bill authorizes projects and studies that will dramatically improve water supply reliability for farms and communities, restore what may become one of the largest sockeye salmon runs in the lower 48 states, protect public lands, and upgrade antiquated irrigation systems. U.S. Representatives Dave Reichert (R-WA) and Dan Newhouse (R-WA) introduced a companion bill, H.R. 4686, in the House of Representatives on March 4.

These legislative efforts support the work of a holistic approach to water management known as the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (Yakima Plan), a multifaceted agreement hammered out by a diverse stakeholder coalition that includes conservation groups, farmers, irrigators, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and federal, state and county governments. Washington's Yakima River supports a \$4 billion agricultural economy, provides hiking, camping, fishing, and boating opportunities, and has sustained the Yakama Nation for millennia. The Yakima Plan presents a comprehensive solution to secure sustainable supplies for these varied needs.

“It is exciting to see Senators Cantwell and Murray's Yakima water enhancement bill move forward in support of one of our most important watersheds in Washington State,” said Tom Tebb, director of the Office of Columbia River with the Washington Department of Ecology. “This Act is essential as we build on the success we've already achieved in the Yakima Basin to

assure water security in times of drought and to prepare for climate change. The Act will fund real projects to construct fish passage at reservoirs, improve streamflows throughout the watershed, and bolster water supplies for one of the country's top agricultural regions.”

On March 21, World Water Day, Senator Cantwell published a white paper outlining a national framework for drought and water security that called the Yakima Plan “a national model for watershed management.” That same day, members of the Yakima Plan stakeholder group were invited to the first White House Water Summit in recognition of their collaborative efforts.

“The Yakama Nation wishes to thank Senators Cantwell and Murray and their colleagues for their leadership on this forward looking legislation.” Phil Rigdon, Department of Natural Resources Deputy Director for the Yakama Nation. “Our approach of bringing together long-time adversaries to restore salmon runs while enhancing agricultural and domestic water supplies has brought consensus around the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan. This is a key step in restoring the resources the Yakama people were promised by Treaty 150 years ago. We look forward to working with Representatives Newhouse and Reichert on House legislation.”

“Those of us in the Yakima Basin are ecstatic to see this amendment pass as part of the bipartisan Energy Bill,” said Urban Eberhart, Manager of the Kittitas Reclamation District, “We cannot thank Senators Cantwell, Murray and Murkowski enough for their effort on this issue. It just goes to show what excellent relationships and teamwork between representatives can accomplish. This would not have been possible without their combined efforts, particularly the cooperation between Senator Cantwell, Senator Murkowski and their staffs in crafting the Energy Bill.”

For more information about the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, its goals and supporting legislation, please [click here](#).

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