

My theory on finding the best water future for the Yakima River Basin is that if it was going to be easy, someone would have done it long ago. But it is tough going, and the team that makes up the volunteer, non-profit, Yakima Basin Storage Alliance represents every possible interest in a reliable supply of water, except no one has any involvement in the property where the Black Rock Reservoir might be built.

With the snow from this unusual winter still piled along our Cascade Mountain highways, it is hard to focus on what climate change is doing to the supply of water we can actually count on year after year, particularly in areas dependent on slow-melting snows that feed the Yakima River and its tributaries.

I choose not to enter into the debate over global warming, but will just say that we are living with the consequences of climate change that are real, and could cost us our future, if we don't get with it now. Drought years are increasingly undercutting the growth in the three-county area served by the Yakima River, and it is going to get worse.

So, what do we do about it? An inter-basin transfer of water is the only real answer. We reach into the Columbia River during winter months when there is a growing surplus of water that no one can use. It is pumped up hill into a storage reservoir, and used in the summer to supply the Roza and Sunnyside irrigation districts. This water doesn't get into the Yakima River because of modern water use and conservation methods. Yes, there is a dam to impound the water, but if you are going to build a dam these days, build it where there has never been water...and that is the Black Rock Valley.

Now, here is the magic. The Yakima River system then shifts its basic use from irrigation to being managed for salmon production, and the opportunities this brings have long been advocated by the Yakama Nation. Some irrigation districts would still draw water from the Yakima, but approximately 600,000 additional acre feet remain in the River system for fish management. The combination of dramatic increases in water for the "fish factory" and restored habitat will lead to our river system proving the prediction of fishery expert Dr. Jack Stanford that the Yakima River has the best salmon production potential of any stream in the lower 48 states.

The potential cost is a major concern for a lot of folks, accented when the recent Bureau of Reclamation Feasibility Study decided that the Black Rock Reservoir Project was worth only 16 cents for every dollar of cost. Please understand what they reported, because they look only to the past, and only at what the value would be to the "national" economy. They have told us to go out and find regional, state, and local economic values but fail to emphasize any of that in their study. So, the \$851.7 million we in the northwest collected through our power bills in 2006 (an amount expanding each year by about \$200 million) to restore salmon doesn't count for anything under their principles and guidelines. Nor does the tremendous recreational value of 10 square miles of slack

water in a reservoir 30 minutes east of Yakima, or the potential of power generation from a “storage battery” to help blend wind and solar power into our energy mix.

The potential recreational value has been explored in a conservative study paid for by the combination of Yakima and Benton Counties, and the Port of Sunnyside. The 10 square miles of water are reflected in maps provided by the Bureau of Reclamation for a nearly full reservoir; a potential year round condition that depends on also using the reservoir as a means of backing up wind and solar power generation. For instance, when the wind blows and the windmills turn (30 percent of the time), pump water up hill so you can generate power when customers need it. We have limited ways of storing energy, and this is one you will hear more about.

If you add up all the values from this inter-basin transfer of water, held in a convenient storage reservoir, and the potential for returning to historic levels of salmon production in the Yakima and it’s tributaries, water supplies for future municipal and industrial growth, a guaranteed minimum of 70 percent of the water needed to satisfy existing, court-established irrigation rights, construction jobs for a \$4 billion project half an hour away, and (pause for breath) you have a very positive cost-benefit ratio.

The Bureau of Reclamation \$16 million study did tell us that there are no fatal flaws in the Black Rock proposal, that it can be built, and that all the alternatives they have studied for decades don’t do the job now, let alone meet the uncertainties of the future. They started with 35 options, and pumped storage at Black Rock is the only one that meets all the study objectives imposed by Congress.

I can hear you saying that the federal study also told us that dams leak. All dams leak, but most are built on rivers so nobody notices. The geology, as determined by Bureau of Reclamation geologists drilling under the Black Rock site indicates that there will be two potential pathways for water, over time, to escape in relatively small quantities. The Bureau has lots of experience in mitigating this loss, and you will read more about it in their final report this fall.

Just as hydraulic pressure has already been reduced by pumping down the water table at Hanford, any available seepage in our arid desert lands is very much in demand. There are tens of thousands of acres of land, much of it owned by the State that are most interested in pumping down the water table that might impact Hanford. Likewise, local irrigation districts need water for vital growing areas like Red Mountain above Benton City. My bet is that water escaping from Black Rock will be turned into an asset as it is pumped for a variety of uses, even leading to a reduction in the existing water pressure from the west that impacts Hanford. Several federal agencies will help with answers in a study available later this year.

Recent headlines have added a dimension to the Black Rock story that come as a surprise to those of us working water issues for many decades. Our friends at the Yakama Nation and Roza Irrigation District seem to want to go back to an expansion of the Bumping

Lake Reservoir at Goose Prairie and adding Wymer, a small, expensive, storage in the Yakima River Canyon.

The Bumping expansion idea was advanced back in the 50's, and has died every time it has come up over the past half century. I tried to resurrect it during my 12 years in Congress back in the 1980's, even though the existing Bumping Lake had a reputation for not filling each year. It has fierce and well-established environmental resistance, would require a larger dam on a pristine river, involves virgin timber and is nearly surrounded by the William O. Douglas Wilderness. I had the privilege of knowing Justice Douglas, and his ghost lives on. On a scale of 1 to 10, I give the possibility of Bumping as close to a zero as you can get.

The Wymer Reservoir would store a small amount of water in the Yakima River Canyon. We have opposed Wymer because it is only a junior-sized band-aid and more costly per acre foot of water than Black Rock, and it undermines a basic we believe we share with the Yakama's; it undercuts the flows of Yakima River waters that are so important to the restoration of salmon.

The vision that is important to me is to reach into the Columbia River during surplus water months, and utilize a transfer of water into storage that is beneficial to everyone. It replaces our gradually failing water supply in the Cascade Mountains. It is a win-win for everyone including the environment, energy, and the salmon resource. It is vital for future quality of life in our three county area, and it will happen only if we all pull together. This is the legacy I would like to leave for future generations.

Sid Morrison
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