

YAKIMA BASIN STORAGE ALLIANCE



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Yakima Basin Storage Alliance

Study underestimates value, urgency of Black Rock Reservoir project

Group believes federal requirements limit evaluation

YAKIMA – The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation study greatly underestimates the benefits of a comprehensive water storage and supply system proposed for the Yakima River basin, according to the Yakima Basin Storage Alliance.

A proposed Black Rock basin reservoir would provide important environmental and economic benefits to central Washington, the Bureau of Reclamation concludes. However, the Yakima Basin Storage Alliance believes the agency's study fails to consider significant recreational impacts, understates the salmon recovery benefits, and minimizes the urgency of developing a sustainable water supply.

“The Bureau's rules do not allow them to consider benefits that come from enhanced recreation opportunities,” said Sid Morrison, chair of the Yakima Basin Storage Alliance and a former U.S. congressman. “We also feel that the agency's methodology underestimates the value of salmon recovery. Our group is confident that the project is economically justifiable.”

The Black Rock plan proposes pumping water from the Columbia River during peak flow times to a 1.3 million-cubic-foot reservoir for storage and irrigation. That would free

up water currently withdrawn from the Yakima River for out-of-stream use to remain for in-stream flow and greatly improved fish habitat.

“There is a growing body of evidence that suggests the Yakima River basin is a hot spot for salmon recovery efforts,” Morrison said. “Our group agrees with this research, but we do not see how this is possible without drawing and storing Columbia River water to supplant Yakima’s water supply at key times during the year.”

An independent impact study commissioned by the Yakima Basin Storage Alliance to augment the Bureau’s cost-benefit analysis found that nearly \$8 billion in economic benefit will come from sustaining agriculture, generating tourism, and filling construction jobs tied to the project. Of that total, nearly \$3.5 billion would be in recreational opportunities not accounted for by the Bureau’s study.

“We know that the benefits from water projects across the country are staggering and hope people realize how much their livelihood is tied to the public works investments,” Morrison said.

The Bureau of Reclamation is in the fourth year of a feasibility study to determine the viability of Black Rock. So far, the agency has found it feasible to build a dam at the proposed site, construction costs to be \$4 billion, and that a Black Rock dam would meet goals of improving the reliability of the water supply during dry years, improving anadromous fish habitat, and providing water to meet future municipal demands.

Developing a sustainable water supply for the Yakima River basin cannot wait, said Charlie de La Chapelle, a Yakima Valley farmer and alliance member. The Yakima Basin has not added any water storage infrastructure since 1933. Population growth and climate change will place mounting demands on the region’s water supply and create sustainability issues that must be addressed.

“We have been incrementally trying to fix the region’s water issues for decades,” de La Chapelle said. “Progress is being made, but with climate change and measurable increases in droughts affecting the region we don’t have the luxury of waiting.”

Building a reservoir at Black Rock is a comprehensive and lasting solution, the Yakima Basin Storage Alliance claims.

“We are already spending billions on salmon recovery, Hanford cleanup, and other federal projects across the U.S.,” de La Chapelle said. Morrison adds: “To us, saving salmon and sustaining one of the top agricultural production areas in the country are priceless objectives.”

About the Yakima Basin Storage Alliance

The Yakima Basin Storage Alliance is a nonprofit organization that is working to resolve water issues in Central Washington. The group’s website, www.ybsa.org, provides more information on their membership, projects and initiatives.