

YAKIMA RIVER BASIN  
ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION  
YAKIMA COUNTY, WASHINGTON

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**APPENDIX I**

**Finding of No Significant Impact**

**June 2018**

**Integrated Feasibility Report and  
Environmental Assessment**



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**  
Seattle District



## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

### Yakima River Gap to Gap Ecosystem Restoration Project Yakima County, Washington

**1. Background.** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District (Corps), in partnership with Yakima County is proposing to implement an ecosystem restoration project along the Yakima River. Located east of the Cascade Mountain Range in central Washington State, the Yakima River ecosystem between the cities of Yakima and Union Gap has been degraded and reduced over time as a result of infrastructure and urban development. Environmental impacts and degradation can be tied directly to the Congressionally Authorized Yakima Levee System built by the Corps beginning in 1947. The federal levee system includes approximately five miles of levee along the right bank and two miles of levee along the left bank of the Yakima River. In addition, local and federal entities have extended the original Corps system to include several additional miles of levee both upstream and downstream of the original authorized project.

The Yakima River Gap to Gap Ecosystem Restoration Project (Yakima Project) is located near the city of Yakima between the Selah Gap and Union Gap, commonly known as the Gap to Gap Reach. The need for the proposed federal action arises from the degradation of natural processes such as channel migration, development of side channels, spawning gravel deposition and large woody debris recruitment in the study area due to the floodplain infrastructure and historical land uses. The degradation and loss of aquatic habitat, especially side channels, are significant limiting factors for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed salmonids and other species of fish and wildlife. The recommended plan encompasses restoration of lost riparian, floodplain, and aquatic habitat within the Gap to Gap Reach.

**2. Authority.** The proposed project falls under the Authority of Section 1135 of the Water Resources and Development Act of 1986, as amended (Section 1135). Section 1135 provides the Corps the authority to evaluate potential modifications to existing Corps' projects to restore aquatic habitats for fish and wildlife. Measures at off-project locations that have been affected by the construction or operation of the project can be undertaken, if such measures do not conflict with the authorized project purpose.

**3. Purpose and Need.** The purpose of the project is to restore ecosystem process, structure, and function in the Gap to Gap Reach of the Yakima River. The need for the proposed federal action arises from the degradation of natural ecosystem processes stemming from the disconnection of the river with its historic floodplain.

**4. Proposed Action.** The proposed action includes levee removals, levee realignment, spur dike removals, floodplain topographic restoration, side channel construction, hydrologic enhancement of a disconnected floodplain channel, and wetland reconnection. Work would be completed in four areas: the Diking District #1 (DID#1) floodplain area, Sportsman Island, Blue Slough, and Spring Creek. The

proposed action would reconnect and restore natural riverine processes beneficial to native fish to over 320 acres of floodplain through the realignment of the existing DID#1 levee. Realignment of the DID#1 levee would improve fish habitat by giving the river channel the opportunity to migrate and promote bar, island, and side channel formation. The proposed action would also create and restore approximately 20 acres of side channel habitat at the Sportsman's Park Island that is currently lacking in this reach of the Yakima River. Restoration of flow to Blue Slough would restore surface water hydrology to 2 miles/12 acres of relic channel that currently is only wet seasonally when ground water elevations are high. The reconnection of Spring Creek would restore fish access to rare cold water off-channel habitat.

By removing constraints to the natural flow of the river the proposed action reestablishes the conditions that allow the dynamic processes of channel formation and sediment transport to function naturally, which creates and sustains the habitat conditions suited to the ESA-listed fish and other species native to the Yakima River. Restored anabranching channels provide important rearing and refuge habitat for salmonids, especially important during high flows, as well as increased riparian vegetation which provides forage (insect drop) and cover. Many historic side channels that were isolated from the river when the levee was constructed would be reconnected by the proposed action. The proposed action restores inundation of the historic floodplain and associated exchange of nutrients and increases habitat complexity via food subsidies and large wood. The proposed action restores conditions such that this dynamic river system can continue to form and re-form channels as sediment moves around in the system. The project would restore the ecosystem processes that form and sustain riverine habitat, which is key to successful restoration and consistent with Corps restoration policy.

**5. Summary of Impacts and Compliance.** The impacts of the proposed action are described fully in the project Detailed Project Report/Environmental Assessment (DPR/EA) dated June 2018, and summarized herein.

Temporary unavoidable adverse impacts associated with this project are expected to include construction impacts such as noise disturbance to wildlife and residents in the vicinity of operating heavy machinery; exhaust emissions from heavy machinery; impacts to turbidity during the connection of the Sportsman's Park channel to the river; and disruption of local traffic in the project vicinity. To lessen the potential impacts to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, in-water work would take place during the work window of June 1 through September 15. Implementation of best management practices (BMPs) would also minimize impacts to fish and wildlife habitat.

The Corps is coordinating with federal agencies to ensure careful consideration of fish and wildlife resources. The Corps has determined that this project is "not likely to adversely affect" federally listed species under the ESA. In a letter dated 6 July 2017, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Corps' assessment of effects to bull trout, yellow-billed cuckoo, and their designated and proposed critical habitat. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) did not concur with the Corps' assessment of impacts to steelhead and its designated critical habitat and issued a Biological Opinion

(BiOp) on 13 July 2017. NMFS concluded "...the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of ESA-listed Middle Columbia River (MCR) steelhead...will not destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for MCR steelhead." The Corps will implement Reasonable and Prudent Measures and Terms and Conditions outlined in the NMFS BiOp. The Corps has prepared a draft 404(b)(1) analysis and will coordinate with the Washington Department of Ecology during the final design phase to receive a 401 water quality certification prior to project implementation. To comply with the National Historic Preservation Act, the Corps consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and all recognized Native American Tribes in the project vicinity. An initial letter to document the area of potential effect (APE) was sent to SHPO on 3 April 2017. The SHPO agreed with the Corps' determination of the APE on 3 April 2017. The Corps also requested knowledge and concerns from the Yakama Nation on 3 April 2017. The Tribe did not comment. The Corps submitted its finding that there would be no historic properties affected to SHPO on 19 July 2017. SHPO agreed with the Corps' finding in a letter dated 23 August 2017.

Avoidance measures and reduction of impacts would take the form of on-site biological and cultural resources monitoring, the implementation of BMPs during construction, and scheduling to avoid potential impacts to fish and wildlife species.

**6. Finding.** Based on the attached environmental documentation, coordination, and analysis conducted to date by the Corps environmental staff, the Yakima Project is not expected to result in significant adverse environmental impacts. The Yakima Project is not considered a major Federal action having significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.

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Date

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