



Friends of Lake Keechelus and Lake Kachess

FACT SHEET ON YAKIMA RIVER BASIN WATER ENHANCEMENT PROJECT (YRBWEP)

Description: This is a controversial proposal to transfer water from Lake Keechelus and Lake Kachess to junior water rights holders in the Yakima Basin. A total of 12 projects are proposed at an estimated cost of \$6 billion, however the Phase 1 (first 5 years) priority will be to drain water primarily from the Lake Keechelus watershed area. To a lesser degree water will be drained from the Lake Kachess watershed area. These are known as the “the K Projects” in YRBWEP. Fish passage and conservation projects are included but represent a small percentage of the total cost.

Method: Most of an additional 200,000 acre feet of water a year (ac.ft.yr) will be drained from the Lake Keechelus Watershed Area and spilled into the Yakima River, then withdrawn by irrigators. This would occur whenever available water for irrigation falls below 70% of prorated (i.e., junior water rights) levels. With climate change models predicting warmer and drier conditions, this could occur as often as once every three years. To help understand what 200,000 ac.ft. of water represents, imagine one acre, covered with water, reaching 35 miles into the sky! This is the **ADDITIONAL** water to be removed from Lake Keechelus watershed.

Because the YRBWEP proponents claim Lake Keechelus watershed has an “excess water supply and insufficient lake volume,” a 5-mile long pipeline, 8-foot in diameter, will be constructed to drain water from Lake Keechelus into Lake Kachess. A pumping station at Lake Kachess will then move this additional water into the Yakima River, reducing the lake water level 80+ vertical below the lowest level currently possible.

Specific Concerns for Snoqualmie area residents: Increased, constant drainage of water from Lake Keechelus will deplete the aquifer that serves the Snoqualmie Pass community. Our community water system wells depend upon this aquifer to supply the needs of homes and businesses. The stark reality is that the Snoqualmie Pass community water system capacity could be significantly compromised, or could even go dry. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared by the Bureau of Reclamation acknowledges the aquifer will be depleted, that public and private wells may go dry, and that they have no way to reverse this damage or compensate for the loss once it occurs. In addition, draining more water from Lake Keechelus and Lake Kachess will destroy fish habitats and degrade fish and wildlife-related recreation, as well as water-related recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Loss of subsurface water will increase forest fire risk (and fire exposure of residential structures) by reducing moisture content in trees and damaging trees through infestation (e.g., bark beetle). At the same time these effects are causing increased combustibility and fire hazard, our ability to prevent and suppress fires will be compromised by declining water resources. Construction traffic, noise, congestion and pollution will be significant and long lasting (3-5 years) but are dismissed by proponents as being merely a “minor nuisance to local citizens.”

General Concerns: The total cost of YRBWEP is unclear but has been estimated at \$6 billion. A Washington State Legislature mandated study by the Water Research Center (WRC) at Washington State University has shown the benefits are in the range of \$1 to \$2 billion, in other words a net loss of \$4 - \$5 billion for YRBWEP. In addition, 90% of the benefits come from fish passage projects which can be separated from the water storage (e.g., K to K) projects. Finally, the WRC study showed the goals could be achieved far more efficiently by letting the free market operate to exchange senior and junior water rights---all while avoiding the adverse impacts on area residents (swwrc.wsu.edu). Please see the back page of this Fact Sheet for more technical information.

Current Status: The YRBWEP has been a “stealth” initiative that has systematically excluded citizens in Lake Keechelus and Snoqualmie Pass area. Yakima Basin advocates are actively seeking federal and state funds to advance this misguided project.

What can you do? Take Action Now! Send an email stating your opposition to the YRBWEP proposal as a waste of taxpayer money and a hazard to the Snoqualmie Pass/Lake Keechelus aquifer. Comments must be received by March 10, 2015

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For more information go to Facebook.com and search on “friends of lake kachess”

Additional Information on YRBWEP

For additional information:

Spokane Spokesman newspaper article:

<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2015/jan/04/quest-opinion-public-cant-afford-to-subsidize-new/>

Draft Environmental Impact Study prepared by Bureau of Reclamation:

<http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/eis/kdrpp/index.html>

The Benefit-to-Cost Analysis of YRBWEP conducted by Water Research Center involving economists and scientists from Washington State University and University of Washington concluded:

“Based on moderate climate and market outcomes, storage infrastructure projects implemented alone and without proposed [YRBWEP] instream flow augmentation result in the following estimated out-of-stream net present value and B/C [benefit to cost] ratios, none of which passes a B-C test:”

Keechelus to Kachess Conveyance: NB = -\$110 million; B/C ratio of **0.20*

Kachess Drought Relief Pumping Plant: NB = -\$107 million; B/C ratio of **0.46*

Water Research Center Report, pages iii and iv

In other words, one project has a benefit of \$0.20 for each \$1.00 spent (an 80% loss on the investment), and the other project has a benefit of \$0.46 for each \$1.00 spent (i.e., a loss 54% on the investment). No private enterprise would entertain such a money losing proposition, and no public entity should waste our tax dollars in this manner.