



Success Story:

Cowiche Creek Project

Cowiche Creek Stakeholder Objectives:

1. *Bring landowners and stakeholders together to identify issues and determine how to address them; reach agreement by Cowiche Creek landowners, irrigation district, conservation district, Department of Ecology, System Operating Advisory Committee (SOAC - Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Yakama Nation, and Yakima Basin Joint Board), and NOAA to move forward on projects proposed.*

2. *Long term water users provide input to the Yakima Tieton Irrigation District (YTID) Board of Directors regarding the proposed plan.*

Ten-year, collaborative project represents “win-win” for irrigators and fish in Yakima Basin

In April 2014, partners celebrated the success of the ten-year Cowiche Creek Project located in the Yakima Basin. Using the Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) approach, project partners finalized an agreement that benefits both irrigators and federally listed steelhead.

When the Cowiche Creek Project began in 2004, irrigation withdrawal from Cowiche Creek was resulting in water levels far too low for steelhead that historically accessed the creek to spawn. Today—due to the coordination of several organizations and landowners—irrigators are withdrawing water from the Tieton River instead, allowing water levels in Cowiche Creek to rise.



Project collaborators (from left to right): Mike Lust - local landowner; Tim McCoy - Bureau of Reclamation; Mike Tobin - North Yakima Conservation District; Rick Dieker - Yakima Tieton Irrigation District; Lisa Pelly - Trout Unlimited; and Jerry Jacoby - Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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Landowner Jim Lust opens the valve to turn water into his irrigation line providing water through the YTID's improved system. From left to right: Mike Tobin - North Yakima Conservation District; Jim Lust - Cowiche Creek landowner; Gene Stevenson - Cowiche Creek landowner.

On April 10, 2014, project partners met at the Lust Brothers Ranch on Cowiche Creek to commemorate the completion of the project and witness the symbolic “turning on” of the first delivery of irrigation water for Cowiche Creek Water Users Association (CCWUA) irrigators through the Yakima Tieton Irrigation District's (YTID) delivery system.

Laying the groundwork for success

The Cowiche Creek Project brought together members of CCWUA, YTID irrigators, members of the North Yakima Conservation District, Washington State Department of Ecology personnel, state and federal fish biologists, and other stakeholders. Together, these partners worked to enhance fish passage and allow Cowiche Creek irrigators to receive water through

the YTID system. Members of the Yakima Tributary Access and Habitat Program were instrumental in assembling these stakeholders and resource people to discuss a possible collaborative effort to resolve the situation.

Patience, perseverance, partnerships, and planning were key to the success of the Cowiche Creek Project. As the project plan was being developed, stakeholders attended several meetings to explain and discuss the many facets of this complex proposal. Ray Ledgerwood and Doug Warnock of the Washington CRM Task Group facilitated the meetings, which set the stage for discussions that led to an agreement to proceed with the cooperative project plan. The plan called for construction of pipelines on farms along Cowiche Creek to provide ties into the YTID's enclosed and pressurized delivery

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system prior to the start of the 2014 irrigation season.

Trout Unlimited, through the Washington Water Project, secured funding to help with the debt service on the original cost of pressurizing the YTID system, which had been done in 1986. This helped YTID meet the long-term financial obligation. The North Yakima Conservation District and the Bureau of Reclamation found grants to help with the planning, permitting, and construction phases of the project.

Putting the plan into action

Steelhead, Coho salmon, and resident trout will all benefit from the Cowiche Creek Project. An improved YTID system prevents fish entrainment into water delivery systems and corrects fish passage issues on Cowiche Creek. CCWUA will no longer use the two large unscreened

irrigation diversions on Cowiche Creek. This project also provides for in-stream flows to be held in trust, in a flow-limited system.

The Cowiche Creek Project succeeded because partners established an environment where all stakeholders could participate, express their concerns and ideas, and receive answers to questions. The Cowiche Creek irrigators would not have realized this success had the YTID Board of Directors not voted to allow use of their delivery system to landowners along Cowiche Creek. The collaboration of groups and individuals to achieve an overall goal—while helping fellow producers—illustrates the strength of the CRM approach in helping people address mutual natural resource issues.

Below: Lust Brothers wheel line irrigating the hay field just after the main valve was opened.

