



News Release

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Yakima Basin Integrated Plan responds to local drought emergency Full funding essential for protecting the basin’s communities, farms, and fish

YAKIMA, Wash. – As the Yakima region enters its third consecutive year of drought, continued support for the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan is essential to mitigate impacts.

“These are very challenging times for farmers and communities,” said Urban Eberhart, manager of Kittitas Reclamation District and a member of the Integrated Plan collaborative. “What we need most right now is the assurance of full state funding, so we can continue to build out surface and groundwater storage and recapture projects. This will keep the basin’s rivers and canals flowing with enough water to meet everyone’s needs now and into the future.”

The Integrated Plan has requested \$59 million in the state’s 2025-27 capital budget to advance projects that support the region’s water supply for communities, Tribes, farmers, and fish and wildlife habitat. However, allocations in budget proposals making their way through the Washington Legislature are millions of dollars short of this request.

“This is not the time to limit investment in water for the Yakima region—the only part of the state in a drought emergency and the one that also supports a \$4.5 billion agricultural industry,” Eberhart said.

On Tuesday, the Washington Department of Ecology [extended the drought emergency](#) for watersheds that cover parts of Kittitas, Yakima, and Benton counties. A lack of snowpack and

precipitation—especially in the mountainous western part of Yakima County and the east slopes of the Cascade Mountains—has triggered the drought for the Upper Yakima, Lower Yakima, and Naches watersheds. Back-to-back droughts in 2023 and 2024 have compounded the situation.

The Integrated Plan is a coalition of local, state, and federal agencies, the Yakama Nation, and non-profit partners working to improve water supply reliability for local irrigation, municipalities, and fisheries.

Brandon Parsons, Director of River Restoration for American Rivers, an environmental partner, said a primary concern for his organization was enough cool water in the Yakima River and its tributaries to help recover dwindling fish populations, especially salmon protected by the Endangered Species Act.

“These terrible drought conditions underscore the importance of a collaborative approach to water management in the basin,” Parsons said. “By working together, we have developed a road map that once fully implemented will ensure enough water for fish, farms, and people, even in lean times such as these. This is what this plan was built for.”

The early April appearance of near-normal flows in the Yakima River does not equate to increased storage levels, with Yakima reservoirs sitting at just 59 percent of normal (the average water supply for 1991 to 2020). Similar conditions have not been seen in the basin since 1992 to 1994, when multiple years of low snowpack and precipitation led to comparable low-reservoir storage.

It is the first time any part of Washington has been under three consecutive drought declarations since 1989, when the Legislature established the current drought framework. Ecology noted dwindling snowpack was becoming the new normal in Washington, due to rising temperatures and more winter precipitation falling as rain instead of snow.

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