

**Yakima River Delta Enhancement Project:
Rethinking Fish Passage and Stakeholder Engagement in the Yakima Delta.**

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Abstract: High summer water temperatures in the lower Yakima River pose a migration barrier to sockeye and Chinook salmon, and warm spring temperatures increase the predatory activity of bass and catfish just as juvenile sockeye, Chinook, steelhead, and coho are outmigrating. Bateman Island, owned by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and managed under agreement with the City of Richland, sits at the confluence of the Yakima River and Columbia River, in Richland, Washington. An earthen causeway connecting the shoreline to the island completely blocks river flows on the south end of the island, creating elevated water temperatures in the Delta and risking the millions of dollars already invested in salmon recovery in the Yakima Basin.

After years of assessment and modeling, project partners have determined that opening the causeway would reduce spring and summer water temperatures, improve water quality for fish, wildlife and human recreational activities, and reduce predation on already challenged outmigrating smolts.

And now to the hard part...with salmon and steelhead restoration a key objective in the Yakima Basin, improving thermal conditions in the Delta, while balancing community interests, is more important than ever. Beginning the fall of 2016, a local stakeholder group consisting of the City of Richland, federal and state fisheries managers, environmental and commercial interests, the USACE Walla Walla District, and the Yakama and Umatilla tribes came together to jointly develop balanced options to address this critical resource issue. Mid-Columbia Fisheries is working with these stakeholders to craft a flow restoration scenario that optimizes fisheries benefits, maintains public access, and protects cultural and private interests.

To date, this project has been supported by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, and the Department of Ecology, and is currently under consideration by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a section 1135 Habitat Restoration project.