

Title: Yakima Side Channels Project Summary

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The Yakima Side Channels (YSC) Project contributes toward restoration of anadromous fish through protecting and restoring productive mainstem rearing habitats within alluvial reaches. Protection efforts involve purchase of property and water rights to retain habitat function including; in-channel complexity, floodplain connectivity, and riparian and wetland habitat. Restoration is achieved through surface water and floodplain reconnection, introduction of large woody debris, fencing and revegetation.

The YSC project has been on-going since 1997 and during this time, has **protected over 900 acres** of high value habitats in four priority reaches of the Yakima River including the Easton/Cle Elum, Kittitas, Union Gap, and the Lower Naches River. Habitat acquisitions within these alluvial reaches were selected using the following criteria:

- have a willing seller;
- characterized by self-maintaining complexity/ability for future complexity with achievable restoration actions;
- contain or support prime spawning and/or rearing habitat; and
- critical habitat for listed Mid-Columbia steelhead.

Preference is also given to properties that have a water right, and/or are adjacent to protected lands.

Recent accomplishments include protection of an additional 61 acres on the lower Naches River in fall of 2004, and riparian restoration of the South Naches channel on one of these properties in spring, 2005. Both projects occurred via a grant with the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is currently unwilling to fund habitat protection projects, due to problems with accounting. In early 2002, \$1.5 million dollars was allocated to the YSC project for habitat acquisitions. In December 2002 budgetary concerns forced BPA to place a hold on habitat purchases. This funding has yet to be expended. In late 2003 BPA lifted the hold, but decided that habitat purchases should be funded under the capital acquisition program, rather than the expense program. Unfortunately, BPA officials are now unwilling to protect habitat under the capital program until an appropriate crediting mechanism can be utilized to determine how much credit BPA will gain from each parcel that is acquired.

Assuming this problem is reconciled, YSC is proposing to purchase **six properties** in key reaches that support robust populations of anadromous fish totaling **377 acres**. The 377 acres are located in Kittitas County, which is the second fastest growing county in Washington State. Opportunities for purchasing large acreages of riverfront property are quickly disappearing and some of the most productive areas will be lost forever if protection measures are not taken in the near term.