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Reed Diversion Dam Removal Underway

Capstone effort of the 15-year Manastash Creek Restoration Project reopens more than 20 miles of habitat for ESA-listed steelhead

ELLENSBURG, WA – 11/15/16 – Migrating and spawning fish will be able to access the high-elevation headwaters of Manastash Creek for the first time in a century, pending the removal of the Reed Diversion dam. The Kittitas County Conservation District (KCCD) will begin removal of the eight-foot-high structure this week, utilizing funds provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and by the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan via the Washington State Department of Ecology.

“I almost can’t believe we are finally here. It’s been a test of patience and perseverance for sure,” said Anna Lael, District Manager for the KCCD. “It’s only with the support of the Manastash Creek Steering Committee that we’ve been able to accomplish so much in this watershed.”

The Reed Diversion removal is the culmination of a process that began in 1999, when the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) listed Mid-Columbia steelhead as ‘threatened’ under the Endangered Species Act and designated the Yakima River and its tributaries, including Manastash Creek, as critical steelhead habitat. In August of 2000, NMFS and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) convened a meeting with Kittitas Valley irrigators to explain the risk of penalties for harm of threatened steelhead or their habitat. Many water users, including the Manastash Water Ditch Association (MWDA), then reached out to KCCD for help with fish screening projects on privately owned lands.

In 2001, the Washington Environmental Council (WEC) issued a draft letter of intent to sue WDFW, Kittitas Reclamation District (KRD) and private water users for operations threatening Mid-Columbia steelhead, citing unscreened diversions, passage barriers presented by four diversion dams, and creek segments drying up during the summer irrigation season. However, WEC included with their communications an invitation to irrigators and community members to meet with them in a collaborative process which would protect both threatened fish and the future of irrigated agriculture in Kittitas County.

“Manastash creek was in trouble, fish were dying, and water use was unreliable and unsustainable. Together, we faced these realities and worked hard to listen and really understand each other to develop a shared vision for positive change. It’s exciting to see that vision happening.” said Joan Crooks, CEO of Washington Environmental Council.

The Manastash Creek Steering Committee formed from these meetings, consisting of representatives from WEC, WDFW, Ecology, the Yakama Nation, KRD and Manastash irrigators. Though initial meetings were tense, the Steering Group members persisted in searching for cooperative solutions. In 2002, they reached agreement on a package of projects which would remove fish passage barriers and eliminate unscreened diversions while keeping agriculture whole and viable. "This project serves as an example of the benefits of collaborative problem solving," said Phil Rigdon, Deputy Director of Natural Resources for the Yakama Nation. "Fish can access productive, coldwater habitats and irrigators have more efficient, lower maintenance delivery systems. Tribal members will have improved fishing opportunities for treaty-reserved salmon and steelhead."

Representatives from WEC and Manastash irrigation interests brought this proposal before the state legislature, which allocated \$2.24 million to the effort. The Bonneville Power Association contributed another \$1.3 million at WDFW's request. The Manastash Creek Restoration Project developed from that initial plan and those funding sources.

"We were successful in asking the Legislature for those first funds which were used as seed money for the rest of the project" said Dave Duncan, an irrigator in the Manastash Water Ditch Association. "Manastash is a great example of what it takes for a collaborative process to be successful. We set early goals for safe fish passage and keeping agriculture whole and we are achieving those goals."

"How exciting that we're saying farewell to the last obstacle to returning salmon and steelhead to the Manastash Creek watershed. With strong collaboration between farmers and fish folks, we got over the philosophical barriers a decade ago," said Dale Bambrick, Columbia Basin Branch Chief for the NMFS. "Now, with the earnest commitment from local water users, agencies, KRD and the Yakama Nation, with steady funding commitment from BPA and the Department of Ecology, and the outstanding, patient leadership of KCCD, the fish can come home."

Prior restoration work on Manastash Creek involved installation of fish screens and fish passage structures at three water diversion locations on Manastash Creek, and the consolidation of the Reed, Anderson and Hatfield diversions to a pressurized pipeline. Concurrently, partners from Trout Unlimited's Washington Water Project and Ecology addressed the seasonal dewatering of the creek by purchasing 8.4 cfs of irrigation water through a combination of reverse auctions and individual water right acquisitions with willing sellers, while the KCCD worked with irrigators to complete on-farm projects resulting in reducing irrigation diversion amounts.

"This is the moment when we accomplish what we truly set out to fully accomplish, a free flowing Manastash Creek. The collaborative effort in Manastash Creek showed all of us what can be done when we work together and in part led us to the success of the Yakima Basin Implementation Planning efforts," said Lisa Pelly, Director of Trout Unlimited's Washington Water Project.

"Fifteen years later it is so gratifying that salmon and steelhead can re inhabit the Manastash watershed," said Jeff Tayer, WDFW Regional Director at the time WEC filed their letter. "It's

been a long and difficult project and we have been very fortunate to have the dedicated, professional, hardworking folks at KCCD driving this it to a successful conclusion. An even bigger win for fish and agriculture is that the collaborative spirit has spread and gone big with the creation of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan.”

The Manastash Creek Restoration Project has been hailed as a precursor to the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, for its diverse stakeholder involvement and commitment to collaborative process. The Integrated Plan has played an active role in the Manastash restoration effort since 2013, piping 1.75 miles of Kittitas Reclamation District’s 13.8 lateral and committing water conserved through that effort to maintaining flows in Manastash creek, as well as partially funding the KCCD’s removal of the Reed diversion.

The late environmental lawyer John Arum represented WEC and served on the Steering Committee since its inception. Mr. Arum, who died during a climbing accident in 2010, was credited by his fellow Committee members for his commitment to their dual goals of restoration and agricultural viability. His wife, Susan Hormann, said, "For John, the Manastash Creek Restoration Project was one of the most meaningful and gratifying pieces of work in his career. Travelling to eastern Washington countless times over the course of ten years, he worked with farmers, ranchers and the environmental community to develop a plan of mutual agreement and future benefit for all. He truly respected everyone at the table and in turn was trusted by those working with him. The removal of the Reed Diversion, the last barrier to upstream fish migration, is a proud moment for all who worked to make this a reality."

Josh Baldi, WEC’s Policy Director during the establishment of the Steering Committee, said, “I am so impressed by and grateful to all of those who have collaborated over many years on the Manastash restoration project. Like the salmon and steelhead that inspire the work, everyone – the farmers, agencies, environmentalists and tribe – have worked extraordinarily hard to bring back this creek. If restoration can succeed in the Manastash, it can be done anywhere.”

To visit the Reed Diversion site, or for more information about KCCD and the Manastash projects, please [click here](#) or contact Anna Lael at (509) 925-3352 x.207

For more information about the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, its goals and supporting legislation, please [click here](#).

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