Columbia Basin Fish Recovery

SALMON RECOVERY.GOV

Location
Cowiche Creek, Yakima River Basin, Washington

Biological Objective
Remove passage barriers to increase spawning and rearing habitat

ESA Listed Species
- Middle Columbia River Steelhead
- Coho Salmon

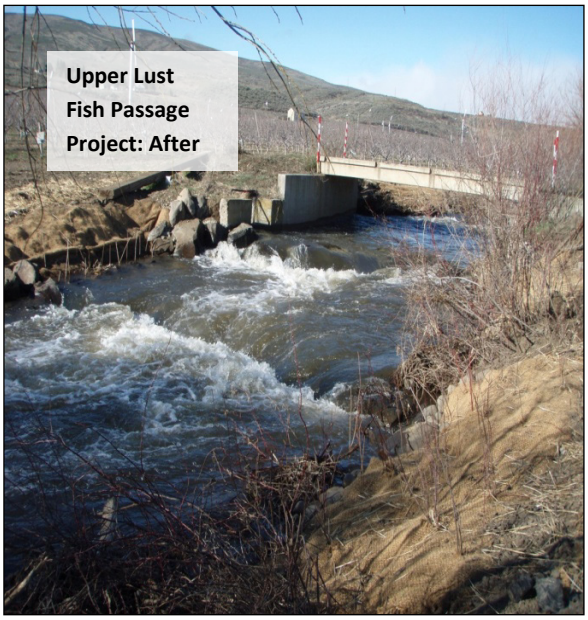
Partners
- Yakama Nation
- Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
- South Central Washington RC&D
- Yakima Tributary Access and Habitat Program
- North Yakima Conservation District
- Cowiche Canyon Conservancy
- Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Yakima city and county governments

References
Middle-Columbia River Steelhead Recovery Plan

Projects Improve Fish Habitat in Cowiche Creek

Cowiche Creek flows from the pine and fir forests of the east Cascades, through WDFW's Oak Creek Wildlife Area, private ranches and apple orchards, to the sagebrush and basalt cliffs of Cowiche Canyon, a popular recreation area right on the edge of urban Yakima.

Salmon and steelhead were blocked from the watershed when irrigation dams were built in the late 1800s. Since the 1990s, the watershed has been a focal area for restoration efforts. Project sponsors have worked with landowners to remove 4 major fish passage barriers (restoring access to over 20 miles of habitat), screen 2 gravity diversions and 18 pumps, and restore riparian areas and instream habitats. A local land trust, the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy, has protected over 2,000 acres for restoration and recreational use. Much of the funding has come from Bonneville Power Administration's Fish and Wildlife Program and the Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund (via Washington's Salmon Recovery Funding Board programs).



Today, steelhead and coho are once again spawning in Cowiche Creek and naturally produced juvenile Chinook have been documented moving upstream of diversions that previously blocked their passage. This work represents a major step forward for salmon recovery efforts in the Yakima Basin.

Restoration and protection work continue, with the aim of implementing key actions identified in the Yakima Steelhead

For information about Salmon Recovery: www.nwr.noaa.gov/Salmon-Recovery-Planning/ESA-Recovery-Plans/Draft-Plans.cfm

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Recovery Plan, which is incorporated into NOAA's new Middle Columbia River Steelhead Recovery Plan.

Right now, the North Yakima Conservation District, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District are finalizing an agreement with irrigators along Cowiche Creek to supply them with piped water from the Tieton River, so that as much as 8 cubic feet of water can remain in Cowiche Creek. This significant increase in summer flows will lower stream temperatures and increase habitat capacity while the new irrigation system will keep valuable agricultural land in production. It is a great example of the kind of win-win solution that is needed to make salmon recovery happen in rural communities.

The Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group has taken the lead on a series of restoration projects in the lower part of the Creek, and the City of Yakima is in the midst of moving one of its municipal irrigation diversions out of the floodplain so that the confluence of Cowiche Creek and the Naches River can be restored in a manner that also reduces flood risks to surrounding areas.

In 2009, the Yakama Nation Fisheries coho program started using a mobile acclimatization facility to introduce up to 10,000 coho smolts a year to the Cowiche watershed. This is a major step towards the goal of re-establish a locally-adapted, self-sustaining coho population in the creek.

The work in Cowiche Creek has been highly visible to the public. School groups are using the creek as an outdoor lab, and hikers are pausing on the bridges of a rails-to-trails project in the hope of seeing salmon working their way upstream.

The Cowiche Creek watershed is an excellent example of how over time, coordinated efforts by diverse partners can lead to salmon recovery at a watershed-scale. Today local partners in the Yakima Basin are working with state and federal salmon recovery programs to repeat this success story in numerous other tributaries in the Yakima Basin.