



2021 Issue Paper: Rivers

Position Statement

The League of Women Voters of Washington holds the following positions on rivers in the [LWVWA Program in Action 2019-2021](#):

- In order to meet present and future water needs within the Columbia River Basin, comprehensive basin-wide planning must occur for optimum utilization, conservation, development and management of water resources. ... Procedures should be established to provide information and citizen participation in policy decisions affecting water resource development. (CR-1)
- Wise planning for the use of water in the Columbia River Basin requires an inventory of basin water resources. This inventory should include water-related information such as ground and surface water sources, viable water rights, current use and projected future needs. (CR-2)
- Minimum stream flows should be established as a public right and maintained on all streams in the Columbia River Basin and all other river basins in the state. (CR-3)
- A special relationship exists between the United States government and Native American tribes. This relationship recognizes the dependent sovereignty of the latter and the constitutional recognition of treaties made between the U.S. and tribal governments. (IT-1)
- It is the state's responsibility to enhance the salmon resource by protecting and improving fish habitat and to establish a procedure for retrocession of jurisdiction to the tribes as authorized by federal civil rights legislation. (IT-2)

Background on Washington Rivers

Westside rivers are impacted by increased fall/spring precipitation due to climate change, resulting in flooding, landslides, and river sedimentation. All our rivers are impacted by warming. Less snowpack accumulates in the winter and is released earlier in the year, reducing in-stream flows and increasing stream temperatures. Dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers create pooling, raising water temperatures further. Higher water temperatures harm salmon and other fish.

In the 2019 and 2020 legislative sessions, progress was made in preserving streams for salmon:

- This big win was the passage of ESHB 1261, finally closing the Endangered Species Act (ESA) fish critical habitat to destructive motorized aquatic dredge mining, which disturbed spawning areas.

- Also passed was EHB 1187 that helped Conservation Districts implement fish barrier removal projects on private lands, adding to the state's fish barrier removal efforts to help our salmon.
- The operating budget also included funding for a study regarding preparing for the outcome of the lower Snake River dams breaching or being removed.
- The Transportation budget included funding for fish barrier removal, which will also help salmon, though a bill funding fish barrier removal for counties and cities did not pass.

Progress on River Policy

The Department of Ecology's Chehalis River Basin Integrated Plan attempts to solve the flooding problem with either a storage dam or flood plain habitat plan, while preserving the rivers' notable salmon and steelhead runs. The League sent comments to both a State Environmental Policy Act Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SEPA DEIS) and a National Environmental Policy Act Environmental Impact Statement (NEPA DEIS). The upcoming session will probably include requests for funding in both the operating and capital budgets. Last session saw passage of SHB 1154, a \$700 million general obligation bond bill for capital projects, which would be decided by legislators rather than the earlier proposed Chehalis River Board. We opposed the dam solution as deleterious to salmon and steelhead runs without stopping all the tributary sources of flooding.

The Yakima River Basin Integrated Plan is in response to the draught years to ensure there would be enough water for the area's extensive irrigated agriculture, joined by the Yakama Nation wanting fish passage installed on the river's 1910-era dams. The Yakima Basin integrated Plan Workgroup, which oversees implementing the plan, will ask for additional funding. The 30-year plan is also funded by the federal government. We support the plan except for the proposal for a new storage dam on the Bumping River that would destroy an ancient forest and the northern spotted owl habitat.

We are also following the Columbia River Treaty negotiations with Canada that will hopefully follow the 2014 Regional Recommendation, which included ecosystem function as a third goal of the treaty, along with hydropower and flood risk management. We also encourage more public engagement and meetings that occur near the time of negotiations.

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