

‘Water Right for Fish’ Delayed

After nine years of meeting and two weeks of heavy negotiations and discussions about the Department of Ecology’s proposal for setting In-Stream Flows, in the end, I think common sense and strong leadership won out.

Skamania County Commissioner J.R. Richardson and the PUD, with support of the Yakama Nation and the City of Stevenson, pushed for, even insisted on, delaying any recommendations about In-Stream Flow levels until much more data about actual streams flows is available. Currently seven streams in the Wind River basin have flow monitoring gauges in them, and the PUD, County, City, and Yakama Nation are discussing funding for more gauges in more streams.

The consensus is “more data makes for a better watershed plan.”

After the PUD held its public meeting to share information with the residents of the Wind River Valley and to hear their comments last week, the Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 29A Planning Unit met this week on Wednesday, June 24th. At this meeting the agenda was changed from deciding on recommendation for In-Stream Flows, to putting off such decisions and meetings for at least one year – two if necessary, until the data needed to make reasonable decisions is available and agreed upon. The Initiating Governments (Skamania County, Skamania PUD, City of Stevenson, and Yakama Nation) will meet more often to track the progress of data collection. The Planning Unit will not meet again for at least one year.

I think, compared to the situation two weeks ago, the people have been well served, and a bad outcome has been delayed for now, possibly leading to a better outcome.

Bob Wittenberg