

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Senior Yakima Basin Irrigation Districts Submit Joint Request to Ecology Supporting Lawful Water Right Administration During Ongoing Drought

Yakima Basin, Washington — May 2026

Naches-Selah Irrigation District, Selah-Moxee Irrigation District, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District, and Yakima Tieton Irrigation District have submitted a joint request to the Washington Department of Ecology requesting that surface water rights be administered by priority to protect senior water rights through the full irrigation season, including October, consistent with historical practices. Last season's early curtailment of senior rights prompted significant concern among district board of directors and water users. Together, the four districts serve water to a combined 142,144 irrigated acres in the Yakima Basin and rely on earlier priority dates for water rights to supply their water users. The request comes during the basin's fourth year of continued drought and emphasizes the importance of administering water rights consistent with prior appropriation (first in time, first in right) and the Yakima Basin adjudication, while recognizing the extraordinary hydrologic conditions facing all water users, including agricultural producers, fish, and communities.

The districts hold water rights senior to the May 10, 1905, priority date of the Yakima Project held by the United States. All four districts also have contracts with the Bureau of Reclamation making a portion of their supply subject to prorationing in times of drought.

The districts acknowledge that continued drought conditions have placed pressure on water supplies throughout the basin not seen in over 30 years, impacting instream flows, irrigated agriculture, municipal uses, and the broader regional economy. These challenges underscore the need for clear, consistent, and lawful water right administration to allow all basin partners to plan and respond effectively.

Under Washington law, water rights are administered based on priority date, a framework affirmed through the Yakima Basin adjudication case, consent decrees, and legally binding settlement agreements. The May 9, 2019, Final Decree, Final Schedule of Rights has each water right certificate showing period of use and priority date with other specifications of each adjudicated right. The districts require administration of their water right by priority date and for the full period of use, consistent with Washington law and the Final Decree.

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