

Ecology developed water outreach update

BAC meeting: Sept. 25, 2024

Overview

In August, community members along Yellowhawk Creek near Walla Walla noticed lower-than-normal flows in the creek. Ecology heard the concerns of the community and found there was confusion stemming from a new effort to protect water supplies in the greater Walla Walla River Basin.

The reduced flows were part of a larger effort to protect water supplies in the greater Walla Walla River Basin and allow fish to safely migrate to the upper reaches of Mill Creek. It was found, however, that the streamflow measurements near the USGS gage at Mill Creek was underreporting flow measurements. Based on that new information, Ecology began diverting additional water to Yellowhawk Creek.

Ecology issued a news release and sent an additional email update in August to help keep community members informed. Based on conversations with community members and the Basin Advisory Council, Ecology has outlined additional outreach once the temporary trust has concluded.

Developed water update blog

- Publish the week of October 7, 2024
- Send to BAC and Ecology's Walla Walla listserv
- Add a link to blog post to WallaWallaWater.org
- Pitch blog directly to Walla Walla Union Bulletin for coverage

Developed water blog outline

1. Introduction

- Review the new temporary water trust program
- The temporary trust is complete and ran Aug. 1 through Sept. 30
- The goal was to maintain a minimum of eight cubic feet per second of water in Mill Creek before it enters the Walla Walla River
- Highlight the significance of the partnerships between WA, OR and CTUIR

2. Trust overview

- The goal of the trust is to protect water from being diverted for other uses as it flows through Mill Creek and to the Walla Walla River
- Increased flows will allow fish to safely migrate to the upper reaches of Mill Creek
- Include quote from fisheries management

3. Unforeseen challenges

- The temporary changes in water management meant that less water was diverted into Yellowhawk Creek
- Community members along Yellowhawk Creek were concerned about lower-than-normal flows in the creek
- Our partners with the CTUIR took streamflow measurements near the USGS gage on Mill Creek and discovered the gage was underreporting flow measurements, causing too much water to be diverted from Yellowhawk Creek
- Once the gage malfunction was discovered, we immediately began diverting additional water to Yellowhawk Creek
- Drought conditions also put an unpredicted strain on water availability

4. Lessons learned

- We can't predict mother nature and didn't foresee the gauge malfunction
- We heard clearly from the community that increased communication and outreach is essential
- We will work with fisheries management to lesson impacts on creeks in the future

5. How these challenges will help future projects

- We will get confirmation of stream flows on the ground prior to regulation
- Create more thorough and detailed water resources decision that outlines how to protect important reaches and branches
- We will improve to outreach to affected landowners where the developed water will be implemented
- Draft and adopt a developed water policy to guide future decision-making with public input

6. Conclusion

- Community input will help us strengthen our approach to additional trust programs