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CHAPTER 2. NATURAL SETTINGS

2.1 INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE

Yakima County recognizes the integral link between the health of the natural setting and the health of its inhabitants. ~~Therefore, it has chosen to include a natural setting element within . To~~ maintain our present quality of life “as defined through our natural surroundings” while accommodating population growth, certain measures must be taken. If we are able to accommodate our natural setting by anticipating and preventing environmental ~~impact problems,~~ we can avoid the long-term costs associated with correcting them. The prevailing objective is to work with the natural environment rather than against it. ~~By doing so, we can all live better, healthier lives.~~

Yakima County's economy is diverse, with significant contributions from agriculture, food processing, healthcare, education, manufacturing, and retail trade. The county is renowned for its agricultural industry, particularly its production of tree fruits, hops, dairy products, and wine grapes. Tourism and advanced manufacturing further bolster the local economy, with both industries capitalizing on the County's rich natural resources and geographic setting.

This Natural Settings element serves two purposes: The first is to clarify the relationship between the natural environment and our built environment. The second is to secure a balanced, resilient, and sustainable approach to future development. Environmental degradation or depletion of our natural resources undermines the very qualities that attract people to live and work here and draw businesses to locate and operate successfully in our region. The element emphasizes the conservation and protection of our natural environment while preserving and protecting public health, property, key infrastructure, and the regional economy ~~people's lifestyles and property.~~

Our natural setting involves and affects all other plan elements and is closely aligned with the Natural Hazards Element, Best Available Science (BAS), development and building codes, and multiple and associated sections of the Comprehensive Plan and is codified in Yakima County Code. While the County is protecting those natural features most sensitive to growth and development (e.g., geologically unstable areas, wetlands, critical aquirers, fish and wildlife habitat, frequently flooded areas, riparian areas, lakes and rivers) through Critical Areas Ordinances and the Shoreline Master Program, other aspects of our physical and cultural landscape deserve consideration as well.

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Commented [KW1]: This entire section is added/edited to bring information up-to-date (2025).

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Yakima County and the communities within it can and will continue to grow, but this growth must occur in a way which balances nature's needs with our own. By embracing a philosophy of [resiliency and sustainability](#), the County can help prevent [or mitigate](#) many environmental ~~problems~~ [impacts](#) and avoid the unforeseen costs associated with correcting them.

~~Our natural setting involves and affects all other plan elements. While the County is protecting those natural features most sensitive to growth and development (wetlands, flood plains, shorelines, and shrub-steppe habitat) through the Critical Areas Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program, other aspects of our physical and cultural landscape deserve consideration as well.~~

Commented [KW2]: Stricken as redundant

Continued population growth is expected to occur in Yakima County. Over the twenty-year time frame of ~~Horizon 2040~~ [Horizon 2046](#), another ~~estimated 31,000~~ [60,000](#) people are expected to live here. This projected growth will have ~~significant~~ adverse impacts on our fiscal and natural resources unless measures are taken to address them in an environmentally sound, [resilient and sustainable](#) manner. ~~By anticipating and preventing environmental problems we can avoid the unforeseen costs associated with correcting them. By doing so, we can all live better, healthier lives.~~

To ~~help complete~~ [achieve the compound purposes of the Natural Setting Element and the Comprehensive Plan](#), ~~these purposes, the following six~~ guiding principles and assumptions [are](#) ~~were~~ used:

1. Our cultural landscape "where we work, live and play" is shaped by our natural surroundings.
2. Our economic base ~~of agriculture and forest products~~ is dependent upon the County's natural setting and its resources.
3. In order to protect the long-term capacity of the environment to support growth, we need to [work within](#) ~~understand~~ the limits of [our](#) natural [setting and](#) systems [and changing environmental conditions](#).
4. Responsible [and beneficial local and regional](#) growth requires us to ~~work with and within our natural setting, develop sustainable and resilient plan elements. We must work with nature rather than against it. We must recognize our limits. Humankind's problems, especially in regards to the natural setting, cannot always be solved with better science or a technological fix.~~
5. [While humankind faces significant and increasing challenges to the natural setting, community input, traditional knowledge, science, technology, and sound planning processes offer proven pathways to achieve growth-related goals and purposes.](#)
6. [Through innovative approaches, adaptive management strategies, and evidence-based decision-making, we can develop sustainable solutions that balance development needs with nature.](#)

Commented [KW3]: Added to bring information up-to-date and inclusive of BAS and acknowledgement of traditional (i.e., Yakama Nation and other long term) knowledge resources.

2.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

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Yakima County's natural setting and has historically been a cornerstone of our economic prosperity. The long sunny days and cool nights have helped Yakima County become one of the top agricultural producing counties in the United States, generating a \$4.5 billion agricultural economy that produces 71% of the nation's hops, 63% of apples, and 62% of cherries.

Our climate has also supported a thriving tourism industry, with over 300 days of sunshine per year and a central location within the state making Yakima County an attractive destination for conventions, outdoor recreation, and family travel. However, the environmental conditions that have sustained our economy for generations are experiencing increased variability and extreme weather events that require adaptive planning and management to ensure continued prosperity and community resilience.

Climatic variation within Yakima County has always been extreme, and recent years have intensified this variability beyond historical patterns. The Rocky Mountains partly shield the region from strong arctic winds, while the Cascade Range partially blocks Pacific Ocean influences, creating our characteristic semi-arid climate. Based on analysis of weather data from 1980-2016, temperatures in Yakima typically vary from 23°F to 90°F over the course of the year, with December averaging lows of 24°F and highs of 37°F, and July averaging lows of 56°F and highs of 88°F (Weather Spark, 2025). Significant temperature variation occurs across different elevations within the County, with higher elevation areas such as Rimrock experiencing cooler conditions year-round, while lower elevation valley locations like Sunnyside experience warmer temperatures, particularly during summer months.

However, the three consecutive years of severe drought from 2023 to 2025 have exposed the region's vulnerability to extreme weather conditions. Temperatures during this period have run 2-4°F above normal, with some areas experiencing departures of 4-5°F or greater. May-June 2025 was the driest period on record for Yakima and Kittitas counties, and the basin received less than 5% of normal precipitation over a critical 60-day period during spring 2025.

These conditions represent not isolated anomalies but markers along a continuously evolving climate trajectory driven by current human behavior and population patterns. While these behaviors can be modified, the physics of atmospheric gas laws—their physical rate of abatement, and or their persistence, means that the greenhouse gases altering our weather, and already emitted, will continue influencing climate systems for decades. Washington State Department of Ecology officials have described such challenges as "the new normal," but this characterization fails to capture the dynamic nature of our changing climate.

Best Available Science indicates that rather than settling into any fixed "new normal," we are experiencing novel conditions within an accelerating trend of change—one that will persist along its current trajectory absent behavioral and policy interventions. Climate change is not a destination we arrive at, but an ongoing trajectory that demands we continuously update our baseline understanding of environmental conditions. The atmospheric momentum already built into Earth's systems means that what we define as extreme today may become moderate

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1 [compared to future conditions, requiring adaptive management strategies that both anticipate](#)
2 [perpetual evolution and actions to mitigate and be resilient to change. Each year's conditions](#)
3 [become data points in a pattern of escalating change rather than establishing any permanent](#)
4 [equilibrium. This framework compels us to plan for continuous adaptation.](#)

5
6 [The most critical environmental shift affecting Yakima County is the fundamental change in](#)
7 [precipitation patterns and snowpack accumulation that underpins our water security.](#)
8 [Historically, the County has depended upon significant snowpack accumulations at higher](#)
9 [elevations in the Cascade Range to supply irrigation water for agricultural operations in the](#)
10 [lowland areas, with an average growing season of 195 days and annual precipitation ranging](#)
11 [from over 100 inches in parts of the Cascades to less than 8 inches in the eastern lower](#)
12 [elevations. This natural water storage system is being disrupted by warmer winter](#)
13 [temperatures that are shifting precipitation from snow to rain, causing earlier snowmelt, and](#)
14 [reducing the total volume of water available during the critical summer irrigation season.](#)

15
16 [By September 2025, the Yakima Basin's five reservoirs reached only 20% capacity—the lowest](#)
17 [level since recordkeeping began in 1971. Snowpack that feeds these reservoirs has been](#)
18 [inadequate for three consecutive years, leaving them at only 35% of typical levels entering the](#)
19 [2025 irrigation season. Environmental projections indicate that snow droughts will occur in four](#)
20 [out of every ten years going forward, fundamentally challenging the water supply assumptions](#)
21 [upon which the County's agricultural economy and municipal water systems have been built.](#)
22 [These changing environmental conditions have cascading effects throughout the County's](#)
23 [natural and economic systems. Extended drought periods combined with higher temperatures](#)
24 [create conditions conducive to increased wildfire activity, as evidenced by major fires including](#)
25 [the Western Pines Fire, Pomas Fire, and Hope Fire that generated extended air quality alerts](#)
26 [affecting public health and outdoor recreation in 2024-2025.](#)

27
28 [Dried vegetation from prolonged drought becomes fuel for more intense wildfires, while earlier](#)
29 [snowmelt and longer fire seasons extend the period of risk for communities in the wildland-](#)
30 [urban interface. Low streamflows during summer months result in elevated water](#)
31 [temperatures that create thermal barriers for migrating salmon and steelhead, with lower](#)

32
33 [Yakima River temperatures approaching record highs in the 80s Fahrenheit during 2024. These](#)
34 [conditions threaten the treaty-protected fisheries resources of the Yakama Nation, the](#)
35 [recreational fishing industry, and the ecological health of the basin. Agricultural operations face](#)
36 [compounded stresses from reduced water allocations \(40-45% of normal for junior water rights](#)
37 [holders in 2025\), higher evapotranspiration rates, increased pest pressures, and market](#)
38 [uncertainties, resulting in fallowed fields, crop failures, and permanent farm closures that have](#)
39 [cost an estimated \\$161-\\$424 million and threatened over 6,000 jobs during the recent drought](#)
40 [years.](#)

41
42 [Despite these challenges, Yakima County's climate continues to offer significant advantages](#)
43 [that can be leveraged through adaptive management and strategic planning. The region still](#)

receives abundant sunshine that supports not only agricultural productivity but also renewable energy potential through solar installations. The diversity of microclimates across different elevations provides opportunities for specialized crop production and ecosystem services. The four-season climate continues to attract tourists and outdoor recreation enthusiasts, though the timing and nature of recreational opportunities may shift as conditions evolve. The County's central location within Washington State remains an asset for conventions, events, and sports tournaments, even as facilities adapt to provide indoor alternatives during periods of poor air quality from wildfire smoke or extreme heat. Tourism and recreation industries that have grown around our climate can evolve to emphasize spring and fall shoulder seasons when conditions are more moderate, while summer activities adapt to include water conservation messaging and fire safety awareness as integral parts of the visitor experience.

Yakima County's resiliency and sustainability planning recognizes that maintaining economic vitality requires proactive adaptation to changing environmental conditions and extreme weather events. The Yakima Basin Integrated Plan provides a comprehensive framework for water resource management that addresses both water supply reliability and ecosystem health through reservoir storage optimization, conservation measures, habitat restoration, and infrastructure improvements. The County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan reduces vulnerability to fire through fuel reduction, defensible space creation, and emergency preparedness. Agricultural support programs promote adoption of drought-resistant crop varieties, precision irrigation technologies, soil health practices, and diversification strategies that build resilience to environmental variability. Urban planning and development regulations incorporate low-impact development, green infrastructure, and heat island mitigation to reduce vulnerability of built environments. Energy policies encourage renewable energy deployment, energy efficiency improvements, and transportation alternatives that reduce environmental impacts while creating local economic opportunities. Emergency management systems enhance coordination among agencies and communities for drought response, wildfire evacuation, extreme heat events, and air quality emergencies.

Looking forward, Yakima County must view climate not as a static backdrop but as a dynamic force requiring continuous monitoring, assessment, and adaptive response. The Washington State Growth Management Act now requires counties to incorporate resiliency elements into comprehensive planning, including drought preparedness, wildfire risk assessment, and sustainability strategies. This planning imperative aligns with Yakima County's practical need to protect lives, property, natural resources, and economic assets from weather-related hazards while positioning the community to thrive under changing conditions. By embracing environmental adaptation as a core planning principle—through water conservation, wildfire preparedness, agricultural innovation, ecosystem restoration, renewable energy deployment, and community resilience building—Yakima County can continue to leverage its geographic and climatic advantages while managing emerging risks. The climate that has been a major contributor to the health of our local economy can remain so, but only through deliberate, science-informed, and collaborative efforts to adapt our practices, infrastructure, and expectations to the environmental conditions of the 21st century.

Yakima County and the larger Yakima River Basin is the site of the federally developed Yakima Project. The purpose of the Yakima Project is to store and deliver irrigation water, with hydroelectric power generation as an associated function. The six project reservoirs (see Table 2.5.2.1-1) also provide incidental flood control, recreation benefits, and some flows for fish. Three of the project's six reservoirs, Rimrock Lake, Clear Lake and Bumping Lakes, lie within Yakima County in the upper Naches River basin. The other three reservoirs (Cle Elum, Kachess & Keechelus) are located in the upper Yakima basin near its headwaters in Kittitas County. The three upper reservoirs supply water to lands in the basin above the Yakima-Naches River confluence. They are also the main water suppliers of the large irrigation districts in the lower Yakima Valley. The upper Naches reservoirs provide irrigation water to lands in the lower Naches Valley. They also make a small irrigation contribution to lands in the lower Yakima Valley. Total storage capacity of all reservoirs is approximately 1.07 million acre feet, total diversions average over 2.5 million acre feet.

Table 2.5.2.1-1 Major Reservoirs in the Yakima Subbasin

Reservoir	River system	Storage Capacity (acre-feet)
Keechelus Lake	Upper Yakima	157,800
Kachess Lake	Upper Yakima	239,000
Cle Elum Lake	Upper Yakima	436,900 (451,500, 2017))
Rimrock Lake	Naches	198,000
Bumping Lake	Naches	33,700
Clear Lake	Naches	5,300

Commented [KW4]: Update to reflect either new Cle Elum reservoir height and note planned YBIP changes for Bumping, Rimrock etc. (the seven, and timelines, b/c these are all by 2046 I think.)

Yakima County and the larger Yakima River Basin are also the site of the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project (YRBWEP). The Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan (Integrated Plan) is a component of YRBWEP. The purpose of the Integrated Plan is to address a variety of water resource and ecosystem problems affecting fish passage, fish habitat, and water supplies for agriculture, municipalities, and domestic uses. The plan includes the elements of: reservoir fish passage, structural and operational changes to existing facilities, surface water storage, groundwater storage, habitat/watershed protection and enhancement, enhanced water conservation, and market reallocation.

Commented [KW5]: Yakima Basin Integrated Plan INSERT

Cle Elum Lake Project: Prior to this enhancement project there were 436,900 acre-feet of active storage capacity Cle Elum Lake. **Increase from the Project:** The pool raise added approximately 14,600 acre-feet of additional storage capacity. **After the Pool Raise:** Approximately 451,500 acre-feet total active storage capacity is now available for use.

Project Details: The project raised the maximum water level of Cle Elum Reservoir by 3 feet, from a maximum elevation of 2,240 feet to 2,243 feet. Three-foot lips were added to the radial gates of the dam in 2017 to support the raise Construction continues on project to improve fish passage and water storage. Shoreline stabilization work has been ongoing since then.

This was the first new water storage project in the Yakima Basin in over 80 years and is part of the larger Yakima Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan. The additional water is

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dedicated to enhancing instream flows for fish rearing, fish habitat, and migration, while also benefiting irrigation and municipal water users during drought conditions.

The Integrated Water Resource Management Plan Alternative (Integrated Plan) was selected as the preferred alternative and represents a comprehensive approach to water management in the Yakima River basin. It is intended to meet the need to restore ecological functions in the Yakima River system and to provide more reliable and sustainable water resources for the health of the riverine environment and for agriculture and municipal and domestic needs.

The Integrated Plan is also intended to provide the flexibility and adaptability to address potential climate changes and other factors that may affect the basin's water resources in the future. The Integrated Plan includes three components of water management in the Yakima basin - Habitat, Systems Modification, and Water Supply. The intent of the Integrated Plan is to implement a comprehensive program that will incorporate all three components using seven elements to improve water resources in the basin:

1. Reservoir Fish Passage Element (Habitat Component);

a. Provide fish passage at the five major Yakima River basin dams – Cle Elum, Bumping Lake, Tieton, Keechelus, and Kachess – as well as Clear Lake Dam.

- Structural and Operational Changes Element (Systems Modification Component);

2. Cle Elum Pool Raise,

3. Kittitas Reclamation District Canal Modifications,

4. Keechelus-to-Kachess Pipeline,

5. Subordinate Power at Roza Dam and Chandler Powerplants, and

6. Wapatox Canal Improvements.

- Surface Water Storage Element (Water Supply Component);

7. Wymer Dam and Pump Station,

a. Kachess Reservoir Inactive Storage,

b. Bumping Lake Reservoir Enlargement, and

c. Study of Columbia River Pump Exchange with Yakima Storage.

- Groundwater Storage Element (Water Supply Component);

d. Shallow Aquifer Recharge, and

e. Aquifer Storage and Recovery.

- Habitat/Watershed Protection and Enhancement Element (Habitat Component);

f. Targeted Watershed Protections and Enhancements, and

g. Mainstem Floodplain and Tributary Enhancement Program.

- Enhanced Water Conservation Element (Water Supply Component);

h. Agricultural Conservation, and

i. Municipal and Domestic Conservation Program.

- Market Reallocation Element (Water Supply Component).

Commented [KW6]: Updated information and moved here to match/flow.

Commented [KW7]: Drought, three years 2022-25

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Reclamation and Ecology worked with the YRBWEP Workgroup to develop a package of projects to meet the goals of the Integrated Plan. These projects are described individually; however, Reclamation, Ecology and the YRBWEP Workgroup intend that the Integrated Plan would be implemented in a comprehensive manner, incorporating all elements of the proposed plan. Implementing the different elements of the Integrated Plan as a total package is intended to result in greater benefits than implementing any of the seven elements independently.

2.4.2.2 Groundwater

Groundwater in Yakima County is found in the basalt that underlies most of the area, in the alluvium deposits located along the various watercourses, and in the Ellensburg formation which both overlies and interbeds within the basalt flows. The following sections describe the three principal aquifers of Yakima County in more detail.

2.4.2.3 Yakima Basalt

Yakima Basalt, a subgroup of the Columbia Basalt, include confined aquifers in interbeds sandwiched between layers of basalt. Within the region, the basalt aquifers vary in their water-yielding character from 100 gal./min. to 2,000 gal./min. Although some deep municipal and irrigation wells penetrate the Yakima Basalt, the source appears relatively untapped and is potentially the most productive and least impacted of Yakima County's three principal aquifers.

Some portions of the interbed aquifers may involve fossil waters which have no source of recharge. Potential recharge areas include contacts between the Columbia basalt flows and the units within the Cascade Range, surface and subsurface drainage along exposed interbeds associated with anticlinal ridges, at gaps where streams have cut through uplifted basalt exposing interbeds, and along fault zones which bisect basalt layers. The Yakima Basalt may also be recharged in upper valley reaches by overlaying gravels and unconsolidated alluviums.

2.4.2.4 Ellensburg Formation

The Ellensburg Formation consists largely of layers of gravels, sand, silt, and clay sediments transported from the westerly portion of Yakima County on to, and in some areas inter-bedded with, the upper basalt flows. The capacity of the formation as an aquifer ranges from poor to good, depending on its depth and composition. Underlying basalt layers generally dip toward the center of valleys and easterly such that more productive Ellensburg aquifers are located in the center of lower valley reaches having deeper profiles of the formation. Principal aquifers in the formation are generally confined, weakly cemented, permeable layers of gravel and well-sorted sands interbedded with less permeable layers of clay and shale. A basal layer of this formation which lies directly above the uppermost basalt flow may be one of its more productive water-bearing zones.

Recharge is by infiltration from precipitation and irrigation, by effluent seepage from surface waters, and by upward leakage from the Yakima Basalt. The most important current source of recharge is considered to be upward leakage from the underlying basalt. Susceptible recharge

areas are those where the formation is exposed at the surface or where saturated alluvial gravels directly overlie the formation. Where the formation contains significant aquifers, the largest natural discharge is potentially the upward seepage to overlying gravel units and alluviums.

2.4.2.5 Upper Aquifer

The Upper Aquifer generally consists of gravel units and principally stream-deposited, unconsolidated alluviums distributed in variable thicknesses along the valley floors. The largely cemented gravel units are considered a viable aquifer only where they contain deeper profiles of weakly cemented sand and gravel. The most productive aquifer (second only to the Yakima Basalt) is the unconsolidated alluvium. The alluvium aquifer is generally unconfined, with its thickest, most productive units occurring in syncline centers. The Upper Aquifer is generally associated with a shallow ground water table which supports the bulk of Yakima County's domestic water supplies.

2.3.2 ORGANIZATION OF THE ELEMENT

The Natural Settings Element consists of six ~~major~~ sections: Introduction/Purpose, Growth Management Act Requirements, Major Opportunities, Existing Conditions; Analysis of Assets, Needs and Opportunities; and Goals, Objectives and Policies.

2.4.3 GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT REQUIREMENTS

The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) does not require a Natural Settings Element in ~~Horizon 2040~~ Horizon 2046, but RCW 36.70A.020 – Planning Goals (1-15) require that the following related items are addressed (specific to this Chapter):

- (6) Property rights. Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.
- (8) Natural resource industries. Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.
- (9) Open space and recreation. Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.
- (10) Environment. Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.
- (13) Historic preservation. Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historical or archaeological significance. To view the list of sites within Yakima County that are currently listed on the state or Federal historic register contact the Washington State Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation.

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2.5 2026 SETTING

2.5.1 Historic vs. 2025: Yakima River Basin Fish and Wildlife Populations

Comprising one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in Washington State with a diverse landscape spanning over 6,100 square miles from glaciated Cascade peaks exceeding 8,000 feet to Columbia Plateau lowlands at 340 feet elevation, the Yakima River Basin historically supported an estimated 500,000 to 900,000 adult anadromous fish annually Yakima River Subbasin Plan – (SOTSP, 2004).. But as more of our natural resources have been put to use, the number and types of anadromous fish have rapidly declined. By the 1920s, the once awe-inspiring fish runs had dwindled to less than one percent of their historical numbers Northwest CouncilNorthwest Council.

2.5.2 Integrated Recovery Planning Frameworks:

2.5.2.1 Yakima Subbasin Plan (2005) - Foundational Document: The Yakima Subbasin Plan was written by the Yakima Subbasin Planning Board under contract with the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) as part of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council Fish & Wildlife Program, which directs BPA and other managers of the federal Columbia River Power System to invest in projects that protect and enhance fish and wildlife species impacted by the hydropower system Subbasin Plan - Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board. The plan is one of 40 subbasin plans in the Columbia Basin, written by a team that brought together local governments, the Yakama Nation, and fish and wildlife advocates to identify issues and priority strategies for both aquatic and terrestrial habitats Subbasin Plan - Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board.

The Subbasin Plan establishes comprehensive habitat restoration priorities:

Flow and Temperature Management: Altered flows of water, sediment and water temperature changes (mostly summer increases) severely reduce the quantity and quality of aquatic habitats. The Plan contains objectives to replicate basin-wide temperature variability by returning the timing and quantity of river flow to a more natural state through purchase, transfer, or lease of water rights; changes in flow management, conservation; and increased natural and artificial storage Yakima River Subbasin Plan - SOTSP.

Commented [KW10]: This section updates the Existing Settings above. Duplication or dated information is ~~stricken~~ above

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Habitat Connectivity and Restoration: The loss of floodplain habitat, especially side channels and springs adjacent to the mainstem Naches and Yakima rivers, were identified as significant limiting factors for aquatic habitat productivity. Actions include relocating infrastructure to allow natural processes to operate, reconnecting side channels by removing obstructions, and constructing artificial channels where current conditions allow Yakima River Subbasin Plan - SOTSP..

Predation Management: High predation risk for juvenile salmonids requires reducing populations of smallmouth bass in the lower Yakima River, improving cover and off-channel habitats, and implementing control on predator populations in mainstem reservoirs Yakima River Subbasin Plan - SOTSP..

Upper Columbia Recovery Plan Context (2007): The Upper Columbia Spring Chinook Salmon and Steelhead Recovery Plan was developed by the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board with the mission to restore viable and sustainable populations of salmon, steelhead, and other at-risk species through collaborative, economically sensitive efforts, combined resources, and wise resource management. The plan identifies 306 actions that will contribute to the long-term recovery of Upper Columbia River spring-run Chinook salmon and steelhead NOAA FisheriesNOAA Fisheries.

Yakima-Specific ESA Recovery Plans:

Yakima Steelhead Recovery Plan (2009): Between 2005 and 2008, the Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board worked with numerous local partners, GSRO and NOAA Fisheries to write this locally-developed plan, which was formally incorporated into NOAA's Middle Columbia River Steelhead Recovery Plan - the first time NOAA compiled multiple locally-generated recovery plans into a larger recovery framework YbfrwbFederal Register. Biologists have identified four distinct steelhead populations in the basin: Satus, Toppenish, Naches and Upper Yakima, with production heavily weighted towards Satus and Toppenish Creeks, which have healthy populations LEAD ENTITY MANUAL Updated January 2023.

Yakima Bull Trout Action Plan (2012-2017-2025): The Bull Trout Action Plan was created in 2012 as a locally-written document that complements the USFWS Bull Trout Recovery Plan, updated by the Yakima Bull Trout Working Group in 2017, with another update expected in 2025. This document provides detailed information on the status of each of the 12 individual bull trout populations in the basin and the actions needed to stop their decline Bull Trout Recovery - Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board.

Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (YBIP) - 30-Year Implementation Strategy: Recognizing vulnerability to drought and climate change, representatives of the Yakama Nation, irrigation districts, environmental organizations, and federal, state, county, and city governments formed a work group in 2009 to design a basin-wide climate adaptation strategy. The resulting Yakima Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan is a 30-year, \$3.8 billion plan that restores ecological integrity and provides assurances for meeting agricultural water needs despite

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[ongoing climate change An Integrated Plan for Water and Long-Term Ecological Resilience | U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit.](#)

YBIP Key Elements: Fish and wildlife habitat enhancement includes floodplain restoration, flow improvement, removing fish passage barriers, screening diversions, and land and river corridor protection. Upstream and downstream passage for anadromous and resident fish will be established at all U.S. Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs, allowing access to high-quality, cold-water habitat essential for restoring depleted runs. The plan will provide 450,000 acre-feet of new storage over thirty years The Integrated Plan - Yakima Basin Integrated Plan.

2025 Species Recovery Status and Implementation:

Spring Chinook Recovery: An important objective is to restore spring chinook population abundance, productivity and spatial distribution to viable, harvestable and sustainable levels over the next 30 years through research on habitat restoration and population management activities such as harvest management and hatchery supplementation Yakima River Subbasin Plan - SOTSP.. However, the 2025 forecast for the Yakima River is 5,000 spring chinook Rob Phillips: Forecasts show 2025 salmon seasons expected to be similar to 2024 | Outdoors and Recreation | yakimaherald.com, showing continued challenges.

Fall Chinook Restoration: Fall chinook populations have been dramatically reduced from pre-1850s abundance levels. To increase Tribal and sport harvest opportunities, there should be an annual release of 1.8 million out-of-basin acclimated hatchery smolt releases from the Prosser Hatchery Yakima River Subbasin Plan - SOTSP..

Coho Salmon Recovery: Coho salmon became extirpated in the Yakima Basin in the early 1980s Yakima River, but the Yakama Nation has achieved remarkable success, going from well under 1,000 coho adults returning per year to over 10,000 fish in 2009, with both hatchery and natural-origin fish combined Yakama Nation's Innovative Techniques to Rebuild Salmon Runs In the Yakima River Basin. Current programs release approximately 500,000-850,000 coho juveniles annually, with the new Melvin Sampson coho hatchery facility completed in 2020 Northwest Council U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Sockeye Salmon Restoration: Extirpation of sockeye salmon from the Yakima Subbasin has reduced the productivity of the watershed and ecosystem as a whole, and eliminated a significant source of commercial and subsistence harvest Yakima River Subbasin Plan - SOTSP. However, the Yakama Nation has been working since 2009 to restore sockeye to Lake Cle Elum, and the first native-born sockeye have returned to the Yakima Basin in over 100 years Yakima Basin Sockeye Reintroduction | Yakama Nation Fisheries. A groundbreaking juvenile fish passage facility featuring a first-in-the-nation helix structure was completed in 2024, projected to help increase sockeye returns fivefold from 20,000 to 100,000 annually Salmon restoration project helps strengthen sockeye population in the Yakima Basin - Washington State Department of Ecology.

Threatened Species Recovery Implementation: Two fish species in the Yakima basin remain listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act: bull trout and mid-Columbia steelhead YbfrwbNorthwest Council. Bull trout surveys from 1996 to 2017 show an average of 558 redds, with counts declining significantly for a number of populations LEAD ENTITY MANUAL Updated January 2023. Steelhead numbers have remained below recovery targets since being listed in 1999 (PDF) Steelhead Trout Autecology in the Yakima River Basin.

Pacific Lamprey Recovery: Pacific lamprey, once an important food source for Native Americans in the subbasin, is a Washington State species of concern under consideration for ESA listing by USFWS. They are currently found in the mainstem Yakima and Naches Rivers, but fewer than 15 have been observed in the Yakima system since 1992 Yakima River Subbasin Plan - SOTSP..

Coordinated Implementation Framework: The Yakima Steelhead Recovery Plan and Yakima Bull Trout Action Plan include detailed implementation schedules that identify priority actions for recovery, with a living document approach providing specific and up-to-date information on projects completed, underway, and in planning Implementation Schedule - Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board. The Yakima Bull Trout Working Group continues to meet regularly, bringing partners together to organize fieldwork, make funding recommendations, provide feedback on projects, and advocate for bull trout recovery Bull Trout Working Group - Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board.

Federal Support and Partnerships: Federal funding continues to provide crucial support, with \$7.5 million in grants awarded in late 2024 for four projects along the Yakima River and its tributaries Federal funding buoys Yakama Nation's fish recovery efforts | Sports | yakimaherald.com. The goal of the Yakima Program is the recovery of native anadromous and resident fish populations through four primary objectives: improving instream flows, restoring degraded aquatic habitat, protecting existing high quality habitat, and providing access to headwater habitats Yakima Basin Program, Mid-Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Current Challenges and Adaptive Management: In 2025, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Yakama Nation Fisheries, and partners are implementing major projects to remove invasive water stargrass from the lower Yakima River to improve fish passage, spawning habitat, and water quality Collaboration in the Yakima Basin: Project kicking off in September will remove water stargrass, improve habitat in Yakima River | by The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife | Aug, 2025 | Medium. The region has experienced numerous droughts, including an unprecedented snowpack drought in 2015, with climate change predictions forecasting the valley's precipitation will change from snow to rain Yakima integrated plan - Washington State Department of Ecology.

The Yakima Basin represents one of the most comprehensive and scientifically-based fish recovery efforts in the Pacific Northwest, with an integrated framework that combines locally-developed subbasin planning, federal ESA recovery mandates, and innovative collaborative

implementation through the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan. This multi-layered approach addresses the complex challenges facing anadromous fish restoration while balancing agricultural, cultural, and ecological needs in a climate-constrained future.

Wildlife Conservation in the Yakima Basin: WDFW Priority Habitats and Species Framework Priority Habitats and Species Program Implementation:

The Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) Program is WDFW's primary means of transferring fish and wildlife information from resource experts to local governments, landowners, and others who use it to protect habitat. The PHS List is a catalog of habitats and species that are priorities for conservation and careful management, with WDFW advising landowners and local governments to protect and conserve Priority Habitats and Priority Species Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

The species and habitats identified for Yakima County were developed using distribution maps found in the Priority Habitat and Species List, which depict counties where each priority species is known to occur as well as other counties where habitat primarily associated with the species exists Title 16C Appx. B PRIORITY HABITAT AND SPECIES (PHS). PHS information is used primarily by cities and counties to implement and update land use plans and development regulations under the Growth Management Act and Shoreline Management Act Priority Habitats and Species: Maps | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Priority Habitat Types in Yakima County: Priority habitats are habitat types or elements with unique or significant value to a diverse assemblage of species. A priority habitat may consist of a unique vegetation type (e.g., shrub-steppe) or dominant plant species (e.g., juniper savannah), a described successional stage (e.g., old-growth forest), or a specific habitat feature (e.g., cliffs) Priority Habitats and Species List | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife. There are 20 types of priority habitats in Washington Priority Habitats and Species List | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Shrub Steppe Priority Habitat: Shrubsteppe landscapes are dominated by rolling, grassy plains or "steppe," with an overstory of sagebrush and other woody shrubs. On the ground, a fragile community of microscopic organisms form the cryptobiotic crust, which locks in moisture and helps prevent erosion. Various habitat features such as streams, wetlands, rocky talus slopes, and canyons support a variety of plants and animals uniquely adapted to the harsh and sensitive shrubsteppe ecosystem Shrubsteppe | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

While Wyoming big sagebrush is the most widespread shrub in this ecosystem, other common shrubs include antelope bitterbrush, three-tip sagebrush, and stiff sagebrush. Common grasses include Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg bluegrass, Thurber's needlegrass, and needle-and-thread Shrubsteppe | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Riparian Priority Habitat: Riparian areas are the zones between land and water such as the edges of rivers, streams, creeks, lakes, ponds, and wetlands. They have unique conditions that change gradually from dry land to aquatic environments. These areas help connect waterbodies to the surrounding land, both above and below the surface. They also play an important role in the movement of energy and nutrients between land and water. [Priority Habitats and Species: Publications | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.](#)

Cliff and Talus Priority Habitat: The Oak Creek Unit is comprised of riparian, shrubsteppe, mixed forest, and cliff and talus habitats that support a diverse array of fish and wildlife. These units include Tieton River riparian habitat, shrubsteppe, oak woodlands, Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forests, cliffs and talus slopes, offering opportunities to view a variety of wildlife, including elk, California bighorn sheep, and abundant bird life. [Oak Creek Wildlife Area Unit | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.](#)

Priority Species Conservation Status: Priority species include State Endangered, Threatened, Sensitive, and Candidate species; vulnerable animal groups (e.g., seabird concentrations, heron rookeries, bat colonies); and species of recreational, commercial, or tribal importance that are vulnerable. [Priority Habitats and Species List | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.](#) Priority species require protective measures for their survival due to their population status, sensitivity to habitat alteration, and/or recreational, commercial, or tribal importance. [Priority Habitats and Species List | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.](#)

Threatened and Sensitive Species in Yakima County:

- **Greater Sage-Grouse:** State threatened, requiring large landscapes of intact sagebrush steppe
- **Burrowing Owl:** Experiencing range contraction, now uncommon outside core counties
- **White-headed Woodpecker:** Declining species dependent on dry forest habitats
- **Northern Goshawk:** Species of concern requiring mature forest habitat
- **Golden Eagle:** Priority species utilizing cliff and rimrock habitats
- **Loggerhead Shrike:** State candidate species dependent on shrub steppe
- **Sage Thrasher:** Sagebrush obligate species
- **Sagebrush Sparrow:** Shrub steppe specialist

GIS-Based Conservation Planning: The most common way people find information about known locations of priority habitats and species in Washington is by using the Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) on the Web app. This online app gives landowners and developers information they need to conserve habitat and species. Many local governments use this app when reviewing development proposals. [Priority Habitats and Species: Maps | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.](#)

PHS data is added to the map after field-verification by WDFW biologists or a WDFW-verified professional. Although mapped PHS data is useful for determining the general extent of priority species or habitats, the department has not surveyed the entire state of Washington. PHS map

[data is meant to serve as a starting point to identify priority habitats and species Priority Habitats and Species: Maps | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.](#)

Management Recommendations and Best Practices: WDFW develops management recommendations for Priority Habitats and Species to align with the agency's mission to preserve, protect, and perpetuate Washington's diverse fish and wildlife. This includes goals to: Stop or reverse the decline of fish and wildlife, including state-listed or candidate species; Maintain or enhance the current structural attributes and ecological functions of habitat needed to support healthy populations; Maintain or enhance populations of priority species within present and/or historical ranges Priority Habitats and Species: Publications | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Arid Lands Initiative Integration: The Arid Lands Initiative is a collaborative effort led by the US Fish and Wildlife Service that identified priority conservation areas in the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion. The extensive effort involved WDFW, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and The Nature Conservancy, among others, providing scorecards for individual Priority Core Areas (PCA) and Priority Linkage Areas (PLA) Priority Habitats and Species: Publications | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative: This initiative seeks to address wildlife habitat protection and restoration challenges while also supporting working lands and communities in the face of wildland fire across the shrubsteppe landscape. Wildland fire preparedness, response, and recovery are important components of this effort Priority Habitats and Species: Publications | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Local Implementation and Critical Areas Ordinances: Cities and counties use the PHS List when designating and protecting Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas under the Growth Management Act and Shoreline Management Act. The mapping of a PHS species or a PHS management recommendation does not by itself create an obligation on the landowner. However, depending on how a local government's development regulations are worded, PHS maps and management recommendations may trigger the local government's regulatory authority Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Ongoing Conservation Challenges: Results from PHS assessments often show that project sites are near surveyed points of state candidate species, requiring landowners to hire professional biologists to prepare Habitat Management Plans. Development can proceed but may require steps to avoid and minimize impacts and on-site or off-site mitigation for unavoidable habitat loss under the Growth Management Act's no net loss standard Using the Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) on the Web app | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Partnership with Conservation Organizations: Organizations like Cowiche Canyon Conservancy (CCC) are actively protecting shrub-steppe habitat in Yakima County—a unique landscape made up of sagebrush and grasslands, flowering meadows, oak woodlands, and basalt cliffs. CCC owns

and manages over 7,000 acres of land and offers over 60 miles of trails for non-motorized outdoor recreation, conserving these natural areas and connecting people to them through recreation and education Cowiche Canyon Conservancy | Yakima, WA | Protecting our shrub-steppe habitat.

Scientific Foundation and Adaptive Management: The Washington Administrative Code refers to PHS in sections dealing with Critical Area Ordinances, Shoreline Master Programs, and the Essential Facilities Siting Evaluation Council. The state supreme court has held that PHS is a valid source of best available science for the Growth Management Act Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Integrated Conservation Framework: Yakima County, and the Yakima Basin benefits from multiple complementary conservation programs that provide a scientifically-based framework for balancing development pressures with fish and wildlife conservation needs. These include the Priority Habitats and Species program, the Yakima Subbasin Plan, ESA Recovery Plans, the Spirit of the Salmon (WY-KAN-USH-MI WA-KISH-WIT), and the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan. Through partnerships among state, local, federal, and tribal governments, along with municipalities and conservation organizations, these programs create a coordinated approach to resource management.

This systematic framework addresses four central questions: which species and habitats are conservation priorities, where they are located, what measures should protect them, and how effective current critical area efforts are proving. By grounding decisions in the best available science while maintaining flexibility for local implementation, this approach successfully maintains the basin's rich biodiversity while accommodating the agricultural, recreational, and residential land uses that define Yakima County—one of Washington's most ecologically diverse regions.

2.3 Update to the 2004 Report - BEST AVAILABLE SCIENCE

Best Available Science (BAS) is a statutory requirement under Washington State's Growth Management Act (GMA) that mandates local governments to use current, scientifically valid information when designating and protecting critical areas. This requirement, codified in RCW 36.70A.172, ensures that environmental regulations are grounded in empirical evidence rather than speculation, protecting ecological functions while allowing for informed policy decisions that balance environmental protection with economic viability.

Yakima County is updating its Critical Areas Ordinance to meet current BAS standards, incorporating significant scientific advances since the 2004 baseline report. This comprehensive update addresses seven key areas: ephemeral and intermittent streams, riparian buffers, wetland ratings and protection, climate change adaptation and resilience, geologically hazardous areas, groundwater and aquifer recharge protection, and monitoring and adaptive management frameworks.

The update process involves a multi-disciplinary Science Advisory Group (SAG) with representatives from federal agencies (U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Forest Service), state agencies (Washington Department of Ecology, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), tribal governments (Yakama Nation), and local expertise. The process runs from November 2025 through October 2026, culminating in a Final Draft BAS Report that will serve as the scientific foundation for updating the county's Critical Areas Ordinance in compliance with GMA requirements.

Yakima County has developed an innovative online enterprise application—the BAS Portal, including an inclusive expert and stakeholder collaborative—to streamline the Best Available Science update process and enhance collaboration among all stakeholders and as part of the “Reasoned Process and Scientific Information Requirement” as defined in the WA Supreme Court decision: *Ferry County v. Concerned Friends* (2005).

The update represents a critical step in ensuring that Yakima County's environmental protections reflect the best current scientific understanding while supporting the county's agricultural heritage and economic sustainability.

The Growth Management Act establishes clear requirements for the use of Best Available Science in critical areas protection:

- **RCW 36.70A.172** – Primary BAS mandate for critical areas policies and regulations. This statute requires that counties and cities include Best Available Science in developing policies and development regulations to protect the functions and values of critical areas.
- **RCW 36.70A.172(1)** – Defines BAS as current scientific information used to understand critical areas functions and values. The statute requires giving special consideration to conservation or protection measures necessary to preserve or enhance anadromous fisheries.
- **RCW 36.70A.172(2)** – Required consideration and documentation in critical areas ordinances. The public record must demonstrate that BAS was included in the decision-making process.
- **RCW 36.70A.172(3)** – Required written rationale when departing from science-based recommendations. If a jurisdiction adopts regulations outside the range recommended by BAS, it must provide clear findings explaining the reasons and identifying other GMA goals being implemented.

Administrative Implementation Framework

The Washington Administrative Code provides detailed guidance on implementing BAS requirements:

- **WAC 365-195-900** – BAS framework and criteria definition. Establishes that BAS means scientific information applicable to a critical area, including peer-reviewed scientific studies, government-sponsored research, and professionally accepted models.
- **WAC 365-195-905** – Acceptable scientific information sources. Identifies qualified sources including peer-reviewed research, government studies, professional technical reports,

traditional ecological knowledge from tribes, and grey literature with appropriate quality controls.

- **WAC 365-195-910** – Required documentation and rationale for BAS application. Jurisdictions must document the BAS used and explain how it supports regulatory choices.
- **WAC 365-195-915** – Scientific review and periodic update procedures. Requires regular review of new scientific information and incorporation into critical areas regulations during periodic updates.
- **WAC 365-195-925** – Monitoring and adaptive management frameworks. Encourages monitoring programs to evaluate regulatory effectiveness and adaptive management to respond to new information.

2.3.1 GMA SMP REQUIREMENTS

SMP sections now reside exclusively in 16d

2.3.2 Critical Areas

Under RCW 36.70A.030(6), Washington State law identifies five types of critical areas that must be designated and protected using Best Available Science. Each type has distinct characteristics, functions, and protection requirements. The GMA also requires local jurisdictions to designate critical areas and adopt development regulations which protect these them (RCW/36.70A.170(1)(d)). The Washington Administrative Code (WAC) Chapter 365-190 identifies "Minimum Guidelines to Classify Agriculture, Forest, Mineral Lands and Critical Areas" (hereafter referred to as *Minimum Guidelines*). Yakima County is required to consider the definitions found in the *Minimum Guidelines* when designating environmentally sensitive areas. The general extent and scope of certain critical areas, such as the 100-year floodplain, over steepened slopes and wildlife habitat areas are depicted on the Yakima County Geographic Information System (GIS). Yakima County also maintains a more detailed series of maps specifically for administering its Critical Areas Ordinance.

Yakima County's critical areas, including floodplains, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, critical aquifers, and geologically unstable areas are associated with stream corridors. The focus of the CAO is to protect these "hydrologically related areas." These designated critical areas include one or more of the following features:

- (1) Any floodway and floodplain identified as a special flood hazard area. Special flood hazard areas are those identified by the Federal Insurance Administration in the Flood Insurance Study for Yakima County which, together with accompanying Flood Insurance Rate Maps and frequently flooded areas are hereby adopted by reference and declared to be a part of this title as set forth in Chapters 16C.05.20 through 16C.05.72;
- (2) Perennial and intermittent streams, excluding ephemeral streams, including the stream main channel and all secondary channels within the Ordinary High Water Mark;

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Commented [KW12]: Move CAO main section up to here. Lead with, and into the 5 + shorelines

Commented [KW13]: Corrected:

Yakima County's critical areas, including floodplains, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, critical aquifers, and geologically unstable areas are associated with stream corridors. The focus of the CAO is to protect these "hydrologically related areas." These designated critical areas include one or more of the following features:

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- (3) Naturally occurring ponds under twenty acres and their submerged aquatic beds; and man-made lakes and ponds created within a stream channel designated under (2) above;
- (4) All wetlands, that meet the definition found in Section 16C.02.425, as required by WAC 365-190-080(1), and as designated in Section 16C.07.02(1) of the wetland chapter;
- (5) Where specifically cited, any flood-prone area not included in a designated floodway and floodplain, but indicated as flood-prone by U.S. Soil Conservation Service soil survey data or geologic evidence developed through professional geologists or engineers (i.e. specific flood frequency, stream channel migration), by information observable in the field such as soils or geological evidence, or by materials such as flood studies, topographic surveys, photographic evidence or other data;
- (6) A management zone area extending on a horizontal plane from the ordinary high water mark of a stream channel, lake, or pond, designated in this section or from the edge of a wetland designated in this section according to the distances set forth in Section 16C.06.16 (Vegetative Management zones).

Rivers, Lakes and Streams in the County are categorized according to their relative ecological function and value and annual flow characteristics into a five tiered rank typing system. Type 1 Streams and Shoreline lakes and ponds are protected by the County's Shoreline Master Program (SMP). Vegetative (i.e., Riparian) and other smangement zone along Type 2, 3 and 4 streams are set and classified according to their size and presence or absence of fish with Type 5 streams (intermittently flowing drains) having no management zone requirements.

CAO-defined wetlands are classified by a system modeled after the Department of Ecology's four-tiered rating system. This allows the County to distinguish between the most environmentally significant wetlands (Type 1) and those minor wetlands having slight to moderate function and value (Type 4). Vegetative management zones have been established that relate to the wetland type and are used to protect them.

As it was merged into the CAO, the County's 1985 Flood Hazard Ordinance was updated to meet minimum federal and state requirements to maintain eligibility in the National Flood Insurance Program. Development meeting the vegetative management zoneing requirements from nearby streams and wetlands, but that will still remain in the 100-year floodplain, are processed through the flood hazard permit system administered directly by the Building Department.

~~The GMA also requires local jurisdictions to designate five critical areas and adopt development regulations which protect these them (RCW 36.70A.170(1)(d)). The Washington Administrative Code (WAC) Chapter 365-190 identifies "Minimum Guidelines to Classify Agriculture, Forest, Mineral Lands and Critical Areas" (hereafter referred to as *Minimum Guidelines*). Yakima County is required to consider the definitions found in the *Minimum Guidelines* when designating environmentally sensitive areas. The general extent and scope of certain critical areas, such as the 100-year floodplain, over steepened slopes and wildlife habitat areas are depicted on the Yakima~~

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Rivers, Lakes and Streams in the County are categorized according to their relative ecological function and value and annual flow characteristics into a five tiered rank typing system. Type 1 Streams and Shoreline lakes and ponds are protected by the County's Shoreline Master Program (SMP). Vegetative (i.e., Riparian) and other setbacks along Type 2, 3 and 4 streams are set and classified according to their size and presence or absence of fish with Type 5 streams (intermittently flowing drains) having no setback requirements.

~~County Geographic Information System (GIS). Yakima County also maintains a more detailed series of maps specifically for administering its Critical Areas Ordinance, these too are located in GIS.~~

The following description summarizes the definition of each critical area according to the *Minimum Guidelines*, with some discussion of their functions and importance:

1. Wetlands

Wetlands are areas inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support vegetation typically adapted to saturated soil conditions. Wetlands provide critical ecological functions including flood storage, water quality improvement, groundwater recharge, fish and wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration.

Washington State uses the Eastern Washington Wetland Rating System (2014, updated 2018) to classify wetlands by category based on functions and values. Category I wetlands are rare, high-functioning systems requiring the highest level of protection. Categories II through IV receive progressively less stringent protection based on their functions and replacement potential.

Yakima County's wetlands range from high-elevation montane systems in the Cascades to riparian wetlands along rivers and streams to agricultural wetlands in the valley floor. The 2026 BAS update will incorporate the latest wetland science including updated buffer requirements and mitigation ratios.

2. Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

Aquifer recharge areas are areas with critical recharging effects on aquifers used for potable water supplies. These areas are characterized by permeable soils, shallow water tables, and significant connections between surface water and groundwater systems.

Protection of aquifer recharge areas is essential for maintaining water supply quantity and quality. The Washington State Department of Health has mapped Wellhead Protection Areas and Source Water Protection Areas that must be incorporated into critical areas designations.

Yakima County's aquifer systems include both shallow alluvial aquifers and deeper basalt aquifers. The Yakima Basin Integrated Water Plan provides important context for understanding groundwater-surface water interactions and sustainable water management.

Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARAs) within Yakima County have been identified and mapped using the Washington State Department of Ecology publication "Critical Aquifer Recharge Area Guidance Document" (Publication 05-10-028, Revised March 2021), and (CITE YBIP GW Studies KVID's ES Engineering et. al study, Vano, et. al 2021, Vacaro, 2009 etc.). Using the procedures set forth by the guidance document, Yakima County has mapped wellhead protection areas, sole source aquifers, susceptible groundwater management areas, special protection areas, moderately or highly vulnerable aquifer recharge areas, and moderately or highly susceptible aquifer recharge areas.

Some areas in Yakima County are underlain by soils which are highly permeable and allow surface waters to infiltrate into the ground water. Below the surface, the percolating water enters the geologic layer saturating the aquifer and supplying water in sufficient quantities and quality to be used as a resource. These conditions create aquifer recharge areas. Some of these aquifer recharge areas are highly vulnerable to ground water contamination and depletion. Soils, depth to ground water and hydraulic conductivity must all be analyzed to determine their vulnerability.

CARA's also provide critical flood storage capacity and support overall water availability, making them particularly vital during extreme weather events such as flooding and prolonged and severe drought conditions. CARAs maintain groundwater levels that support instream flow and temperature-moderated stream conditions. The dynamic groundwater-surface water exchange within these areas support hyporheic zones that filter pollutants and provide critical habitat for salmon and other native fish, wildlife, and plant species wetlands and riparian areas.

Aquifer recharge represents a fundamental component of the County's Growth Management Act Natural Settings and Hazards elements, enhancing regional resilience against extreme weather impacts while serving as a key sustainability measure to safeguard Yakima County's agricultural economy and natural resource heritage.

3. Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas (FWHCAs) include areas with primary association for endangered, threatened, sensitive, or candidate species, as well as habitat for species of local importance. This includes both aquatic and terrestrial habitats.

In Yakima County, FWHCAs include habitat for several ESA-listed species including steelhead, and bull trout. The Yakima River and its tributaries provide critical spawning and rearing habitat for anadromous fish. Terrestrial habitats support species including sage grouse, ferruginous hawks, and numerous other species of concern.

The 2026 update will incorporate updated Priority Habitats and Species data from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, as well as emerging science on climate impacts to habitat suitability and species distribution.

"Fish and wildlife habitat conservation" means land management for maintaining populations of species in suitable habitats within their natural geographic distribution so that the habitat available is sufficient to support viable populations over the long term and isolated subpopulations are not created. This does not mean maintaining all individuals of all species at all times, but it does mean not degrading or reducing populations or habitats so that they are no longer viable over the long term.

Yakima County contains large areas of some of the most diverse and unique fish and wildlife habitat found anywhere in the country. Habitat types range from upland forest to high arid desert. Lakes, wetlands, pristine streams, forests, shrub-steppe and alpine meadows provide support for a variety of plants, fish and wildlife species. Protection of these environments provide

Commented [KW16]: New section recognizes the need and value of managed aquifer recharge for drought resilience and flood storage/protection. This is in addition to the existing emphasis on drinking water quality through well head protection (Yakima County Dept. of Health). This also brings CARA's in line with the general Critical Area Ordinance realm of environmental protection.

places where animals can find food, water, shelter and security, and act as gene pools to assure continued genetic diversity. Large intact blocks of these habitat parcels also provide critical movement corridors that allow animals to disperse across the landscape, which is vital to their continued existence on the landscape.

In addition to supporting fish and wildlife populations, habitat diversity and types can provide biological indicators of the health of the environment. Habitat conservation provides for water quality protection, flood control and preservation of biological diversity.

Fish and wildlife need food, water and shelter. Locations such as riparian (streamside), upland areas meet these needs and are called habitat areas. Riparian areas describe the interface between land and a river or stream. These are ecologically important transition areas that support unique plant and animal communities adapted to the moist conditions near water bodies. Riparian management zones refer to vegetated areas maintained along waterways to help filter pollutants, prevent erosion, and provide fish and wildlife habitat. They include wetlands, bank vegetation, and understory, midstory and canopy tree and shrub assemblages.

The *Minimum Guidelines* (WAC 365-190-130(2)) identify critical fish and wildlife habitat as the following (a) areas with which endangered, threatened and sensitive species have a primary association; (b) habitats and species of local importance; (e) naturally occurring ponds under twenty acres and their submerged aquatic beds that provide fish or wildlife habitat; (f) waters of the state; (g) lakes, ponds, streams, and rivers planted with game fish by a governmental or tribal entity; and, (h) state natural area preserves, natural resource conservation areas, and state wildlife areas.

Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas are protected through Yakima County's Critical Area Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program. Critical areas and shoreline jurisdiction mapping is available at www.yakimap.com. Projects that are proposed in fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas are evaluated on a case by case basis. When required, Yakima County provides notice of proposed projects to other agencies, such as the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, who can require their own permits and/or suggest project design revisions or mitigation to protect species or their habitat. In addition, projects that are not exempt from environmental review under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) require the proponent to assess impacts to species of importance and their habitat. The County, along with the input of other agencies, can require project design revisions or mitigation to protect species of importance and their habitat.

Preserving a wide range of habitats provides numerous benefits to County residents, including ensuring the protection of rare species and maintaining sensitive ecosystems; reaping significant economic benefits from commercial and recreational fishing and hunting; preserving of cultures, lifestyles, and livelihood which center on fish and wildlife resources; and providing aesthetic and open space values which contribute to the overall quality of life.

4. Frequently Flooded Areas

Frequently flooded areas are lands subject to a one percent or greater annual chance of flooding (the 100 and 500-year floodplain). These areas are identified through FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps and supplemental hydrologic and hydraulic studies.

Floodplain protection serves dual purposes: protecting public health and safety from flood hazards and maintaining the natural functions of floodplains including flood storage, groundwater recharge, and riparian habitat. Climate change is increasing flood risk in many areas through changes in precipitation patterns and snowmelt timing.

Yakima County must incorporate updated FEMA flood maps and consider the impacts of climate change on future flood risk. Channel migration zones must also be identified for alluvial rivers where lateral channel movement poses risks to development.

Flooding is the most commonly occurring natural disaster in Yakima County, posing threats to lives, properties, and resources. Floods occur when a stream or river receives more water than its channel can accommodate. Floods can originate from natural causes such as heavy rainfall or snowmelt. However, human activities such as building can often increase the frequency, magnitude and displacement of the flood, hence causing flooding in other areas of the river. Frequently flooded areas are normally adjacent to rivers or other water bodies and include the entire 100-year floodplain, that area which has a one percent chance of flooding in a given year. The floodplain receives water which overflows from the main floodway of a stream or river.

Flood plains and other areas subject to flooding (wetlands) perform important hydrologic functions including storing and slowly releasing floodwaters, reducing floodwater velocities, and settling and filtering sediment. Frequently flooded areas provide natural areas for wildlife and fisheries habitat, recreation areas and rich agricultural lands. Development in frequently flooded areas diminishes these values and increases risk to people and property. Building in flood hazard areas can also result in additional costs for flood protection measures to protect life, ecological functions, and property.

Loss of riparian and floodplain function occurs when areas are improperly developed. This can increase impermeable surfaces and the volume of storm water released directly into streams, rather than being absorbed by vegetation or soil. Similarly, unsustainable logging of forest lands can increase storm water runoff, erosion, and sedimentation. The result is an increase in the area covered by floodwaters. Structures built in flood prone areas are often damaged or destroyed by floods.

Frequently Flooded Areas (FFA), are defined as the floodway, flood fringe, the 100 and 500 year floodplain, flood zones, and Special Flood Hazard Areas by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the National Flood Insurance Act. Preliminary and updated Flood Insurance Rate, or FIRM, maps, floods of records, and mapped channel migration zones provide spatial boundaries for FFA's.

Commented [KW17]: The majority of SMP ORD language will be referenced in 16C.05 Frequently Flooded Areas/Flood Hazard 8th Areas, Wetlands, CARAs and the other CAO sections.

Commented [KW18]: Title 22 INSERT
SMP INSERT See p43 **SHORELINES:**
PURPOSE STATEMENT NS 7 and Title 22 "hazard" and ref. CH3
Natural Hazard content

Commented [KW19]: Corrected: Loss of riparian and floodplain function occurs when areas are improperly developed. This can increase impermeable surfaces and the volume of storm water released directly into streams, rather than being absorbed by vegetation or soil. Similarly, unsustainable logging of forest lands can increase storm water runoff, erosion, and sedimentation. The result is an increase in the area covered by floodwaters. Structures built in flood prone areas are often damaged or destroyed by floods.

Projects that are proposed on parcels in special flood hazard areas are reviewed under the authority of Yakima County's Critical Area Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program and require a flood hazard determination or flood hazard permit. Projects within special flood hazards areas must comply with building standards that are designed to protect property and not cause a rise in the base flood elevation.

5. Geologically Hazardous Areas

Geologically hazardous areas include areas susceptible to erosion, sliding, earthquake, volcanic activity, or other geological events. These areas pose risks to health, safety, and property and require careful site-specific evaluation for development proposals.

Yakima County's geological hazards include landslide hazard areas (particularly in areas with steep slopes and unstable soils), seismic hazard areas (the county lies within a seismically active region), volcanic hazard areas (proximity to Mount Adams and Mount Rainier), and erosion hazard areas (wind and water erosion in agricultural areas).

The 2026 update will incorporate updated geological hazard mapping from the Washington Geological Survey and consider climate change impacts on landslide risk from changing precipitation patterns.

Geologic Hazards pose a threat to the health and safety of County citizens when development and associated infrastructure is sited in areas of significant hazard. In some cases the risk to proposed activities, and/or the environment within or near geologic hazards can be reduced (or mitigated) to acceptable levels by engineering design, or modified construction practices. In areas where these measures are not sufficient to reduce the risk from geologic hazards, building or disturbance is best avoided. Land use controls should reflect the degree of hazard and risk.

Alluvial areas and drainage corridors constitute particularly significant components of geologically unstable critical areas. Alluvial zones, formed by sediment deposits from flowing water, create inherently unstable soils prone to erosion, liquefaction, and lateral movement. These areas, combined with steep drainage channels and associated riparian corridors, form interconnected hydrological systems where geological instability can cascade through entire watersheds. Development activities in these sensitive areas can trigger erosion processes that extend far beyond the immediate project site, affecting both upstream and downstream areas.

A critical function of controlling development in these geologically unstable areas is protecting receiving waters from excessive sediment input and preventing hydrological alteration that accelerates stream course and bank erosion. When alluvial soils and drainage areas are disturbed, the resulting increase in sediment loading can severely degrade water quality in downstream receiving waters, harm aquatic ecosystems, and reduce the capacity of water bodies to support beneficial uses. Additionally, alterations to natural drainage patterns and the removal of stabilizing vegetation can fundamentally change hydrological processes, increasing surface runoff velocity and volume, which in turn accelerates channel incision that can undermine adjacent infrastructure and natural systems.

Characteristic reasons for controlling land-use activities proposed in areas of geological hazardous areas include:

1. Preventing damage or loss of property;
2. Protecting water quality, river and stream hydrological functions, and preventing increased flooding risk and hazard. ;
3. Minimizing public expenditures for repairing or preventing damage to public and private property;
4. Protecting aesthetic resources (e.g. integrity of steep slopes) and natural character of the landscape.

For example, failing to control drainage on development sites up-gradient from a landslide hazard or steep slope area could result in slope failure. This can lead to loss of life, is difficult and expensive to mitigate, can impact the landscape and degrade water quality, and exasperate flooding.. Projects proposed in or near a mapped geological hazard are evaluated on a case by case basis under the authority of Yakima County's Critical Area Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program. The proponent may be required to prepare a geological hazard report (typically mandatory in identified landslide areas) and receive a development authorization. Projects that could potentially contribute to an increase in the hazard, or in the risk to life and property on or off the site, would be required to mitigate risks to an acceptable level through design and construction practices..

2.3.2 Wetlands

~~Wetlands are areas which have saturated soils or standing water for at least part of the year, contain hydric soils, and which contain water-loving vegetation. Areas such as swamps, marshes, and bogs are generally considered wetlands. The Critical Areas Ordinance uses a four-tier rating system for wetlands, recognizing that some wetland systems are more valuable or irreplaceable than others. The rating system is based on the wetland's functions and values, degree of sensitivity to disturbance, rarity, and ability to compensate for destruction or degradation (WAC 365-190-090).~~

~~Wetlands are economically, biologically, and physically valuable resources to Yakima County. They are the most biologically productive ecosystems in nature, even though they constitute only a small percentage of the County's total landscape. For many species, including waterfowl, birds, fish, reptiles, invertebrates, and mammals, wetlands are essential habitat for feeding, nesting, breeding, and cover. Illustrative of wetland importance is the fact that at least one third of the state's endangered and threatened species require wetlands for their survival. The state Department of Fish and Wildlife lists over 175 wildlife species that use wetlands for primary feeding habitat and 140 species that use them for primary breeding habitat. Since the turn of the century, the Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates that Washington State has lost half of its original wetlands. Consequently, the functions and values of the existing wetlands increase and require more protection.~~

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~~Wetlands are important nursery and spawning areas and provide nutrient sources critical to the survival of fisheries. These fisheries in turn support a strong commercial and recreational industry. Wetlands are also potential sources for harvesting of marsh vegetation and aquaculture and under proper management, forested wetlands are an important source of timber. Wetlands play important functions in local and regional hydrologic cycles. These functions include:~~

- ~~1. Lessening flood damage by slowing and storing flood waters;~~
- ~~2. Reducing shoreline erosion by waves and currents;~~
- ~~3. Protecting water quality by filtering out sediment and other water pollutants;~~
- ~~4. Biological processes that recycle and restore nutrients; and~~
- ~~5. Storing and recharging water to both surface and ground water systems, thereby helping to maintain stream flows during periods of low flow and replenishing drinking water supplies.~~

~~Wetland areas within Yakima County have been identified through the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) mapping efforts, as well as a landscape assessment by County staff. "Potential Wetland" locations are available through Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping efforts both within Yakima County Public Services and available online at www.yakimap.com. This mapping system, along with aerial photography interpretation, is used to review projects that have the potential to disturb wetland areas. Both project level and non-project level actions are reviewed on a case-by-case basis to ensure there is no loss of wetland functions and values. Depending on the location, protection of the wetlands are accomplished through development standards in the [Critical Areas Ordinance or Shoreline Master Program](#).~~

2.3.3 Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

~~Ground water is the primary source of drinking water for most rural County residents. The city of Yakima is the only city within the County that uses surface water as a primary source (Naches River). All other jurisdictions currently depend upon the County's aquifers as their primary source of water. Once ground water is contaminated it is difficult, costly, and often impossible to clean up. Some contaminants like microbial organisms can cause sickness and discomfort while others like organic chemicals, inorganic metals, and radio nuclides can cause neurological disorders, cancer, mutations and even death.~~

~~Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARAs) within Yakima County have been identified and mapped using the Washington State Department of Ecology publication "Critical Aquifer Recharge Area Guidance Document" (Publication 05-10-028, Revised March 2021). Using the procedures set forth by the guidance document, Yakima County has mapped wellhead protection areas, sole source aquifers, susceptible groundwater management areas, special protection areas, moderately or highly vulnerable aquifer recharge areas, and moderately or highly susceptible aquifer recharge areas. Some areas in Yakima County are underlain by soils which are highly permeable and allow surface waters to infiltrate into the ground water. Below the surface, the percolating water enters the geologic layer saturating the aquifer and supplying water in~~

Commented [KW20]: Other processes to be more EA. WA.? Or just "reducing shoreline erosion by protecting....stabilizing...."

Commented [KW21]: Update to ID the new Nelson diversion, and the planned Naches expansion of the WWTP?

~~sufficient quantities and quality to be used as a resource. These conditions create aquifer recharge areas. Some of these aquifer recharge areas are highly vulnerable to ground water contamination. Soils, depth to ground water and hydraulic conductivity must all be analyzed to determine their vulnerability.~~

2.3.4 Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

~~"Fish and wildlife habitat conservation" means land management for maintaining populations of species in suitable habitats within their natural geographic distribution so that the habitat available is sufficient to support viable populations over the long term and isolated subpopulations are not created. This does not mean maintaining all individuals of all species at all times, but it does mean not degrading or reducing populations or habitats so that they are no longer viable over the long term. Yakima County contains large areas of some of the most diverse and unique fish and wildlife habitat found anywhere in the country. Habitat types range from upland forest to high arid desert. Lakes, wetlands, pristine streams, forests, shrub-steppe and alpine meadows provide support for a variety of plants, fish and wildlife species. Protection of these environments provide places where animals can find food, water, shelter and security, and act as gene pools to assure continued genetic diversity. Large intact blocks of these habitat parcels also provide critical movement corridors that allow animals to disperse across the landscape, which is vital to their continued existence on the landscape.~~

~~In addition to supporting fish and wildlife populations, habitat diversity and types can provide biological indicators of the health of the environment. Habitat conservation provides for water quality protection, flood control and preservation of biological diversity.~~

~~Fish and wildlife need food, water and shelter. Locations such as riparian (streamside), upland areas meet these needs and are called habitat areas. The *Minimum Guidelines* (WAC 365-190-130(2)) identify critical fish and wildlife habitat as the following (a) areas with which endangered, threatened and sensitive species have a primary association; (b) habitats and species of local importance; (c) naturally occurring ponds under twenty acres and their submerged aquatic beds that provide fish or wildlife habitat; (f) waters of the state; (g) lakes, ponds, streams, and rivers planted with game fish by a governmental or tribal entity; and, (h) state natural area preserves, natural resource conservation areas, and state wildlife areas.~~

~~Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas are protected through Yakima County's Critical Area Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program. Critical areas and shoreline jurisdiction mapping is available at . Projects that are proposed in fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas are evaluated on a case by case basis. When required, Yakima County provides notice of proposed projects to other agencies, such as the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, who can require their own permits and/or suggest project design revisions or mitigation to protect species or their habitat. In addition, projects that are not exempt from environmental review under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) require the proponent to assess impacts to species of importance and their habitat. The County, along with the input of other agencies, can require project design revisions or mitigation to protect species of importance and their habitat.~~

Preserving a wide range of habitats provides numerous benefits to County residents, including ensuring the protection of rare species and maintaining sensitive ecosystems; reaping significant economic benefits from commercial and recreational fishing and hunting; preserving of cultures, lifestyles, and livelihood which center on fish and wildlife resources; and providing aesthetic and open space values which contribute to the overall quality of life.

2.3.5 Frequently Flooded Areas

Flood plains and other areas subject to flooding (wetlands) perform important hydrologic functions including storing and slowly releasing floodwaters, reducing floodwater velocities, and settling and filtering sediment. Frequently flooded areas provide natural areas for wildlife and fisheries habitat, recreation areas and rich agricultural lands. Development in frequently flooded areas diminishes these values and can present a risk to persons and property on the development site and/or downstream from the development. Building in flood hazard areas also results in additional costs for installing flood protection measures to protect life and property. Additional costs are incurred when flooded property must be repaired.

Flooding is the most commonly occurring natural disaster in Yakima County, posing threats to lives, properties, and resources. Floods occur when a stream or river receives more water than its channel can accommodate. Floods can originate from natural causes such as heavy rainfall or snowmelt. However, human activities such as building can often increase the frequency, magnitude and displacement of the flood, hence causing flooding in other areas of the river. Frequently flooded areas are normally adjacent to rivers or other water bodies and include the entire 100-year floodplain, that area which has a one percent chance of flooding in a given year. The floodplain receives water which overflows from the main floodway of a stream or river.

Loss of vegetation and soil often occurs when areas are developed. This causes a loss in permeable surfaces, thereby increasing the volume of storm water which is released directly into streams, rather than being absorbed by vegetation or soil. In a similar manner, extensive logging of forest lands can increase storm water runoff erosion, and sedimentation. The result of these actions is an increase in the area which can be expected to be covered by floodwaters. Structures built in flood prone areas are often damaged or destroyed by floods. At times, people's lives are jeopardized.

Frequently Flooded Areas (FFA), defined as floodways, 100-year floodplain as identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), preliminary updated FIRM maps, floods of records and mapped channel migration zones. Projects that are proposed on parcels that have mapped special flood hazard areas are reviewed under the authority of Yakima County's Critical Area Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program and require a flood hazard determination or flood hazard permit. Projects within special flood hazards areas must comply with building standards that are designed to protect property and not cause a rise in the base flood elevation.

Commented [KW22]: The majority of SMP ORD language will be referenced in 16C.05 Frequently Flooded Areas/Flood Hazard 8th Areas, Wetlands, CARAs and the other CAO sections.

Commented [KW23]: Title 22 INSERT
SMP INSERT See p43 **SHORELINES:**
PURPOSE STATEMENT NS 7 and Title 22 "hazard" and ref. CH3
Natural Hazard content

Commented [KW24]: Corrected: Loss of riparian and floodplain function occurs when areas are improperly developed. This can increase impermeable surfaces and the volume of storm water released directly into streams, rather than being absorbed by vegetation or soil. Similarly, unsustainable logging of forest lands can increase storm water runoff, erosion, and sedimentation. The result is an increase in the area covered by floodwaters. Structures built in flood prone areas are often damaged or destroyed by floods.

2.3.6 Geologically Hazardous Areas

2.3.7 Cultural Resources

The location of many areas of cultural significance are unknown to most property owners and typically will remain confidential to protect their integrity. However, Yakima County utilizes the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation's (DAHP) archaeological and historic database and the Yakama Nation's Cultural Resource Program to determine if prospective land use permits may impact archaeological or cultural resources. As part of permit review, if a proposal requires public notice Yakima County notifies the Yakama Nation Cultural Resources office soliciting comments regarding cultural resources. In addition, if the property is within 500' of an identified archaeological or cultural resource site, as determined by DAHP's database applicants will be required to consult with ~~both~~ the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Yakama Nation) and DAHP to determine if their project has ~~any~~ potential ~~to~~ impacts ~~to those~~ resources. ~~For On-project permits~~ beyond 500' of an identified archaeological or cultural resource site, Yakima County will rely on the Yakama Nation comments on projects that require notification, as well as DAHP's comments through the SEPA register.

2.3.8 Critical Areas Ordinance

~~Following a number of hearings and considerable public testimony, Yakima County adopted a Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) in July, 1994 that focused on the protection of twenty selected stream corridors. This original ordinance was challenged, and under orders from the Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board, was amended by the Board of Yakima County Commissioners in July, 1995. In compliance with the requirements of the Growth Management Act, Yakima County updated the 1995 CAO in December 2007. The 2007 update of the CAO started in May of 2004 with three public workshops at three different geographic locations to introduce the CAO draft update strategy. At that time, the draft update strategy was dispersed throughout the county and was used to encourage discussion between the public and the project staff so that general strategies could be understood before writing the ordinance.~~

~~From May 2004 to August 2004, planning staff held twenty-five meetings with interest groups, local and State agency representatives, local government groups, The County-Wide Planning Policy Committee, and the Yakima County Planning Commission in order to solicit comments on the draft update strategy. From these meetings, project staff compiled a list of all comments received on the draft update strategy. Comments received were closely reviewed and compiled them into a separate document for public review.~~

~~After reviewing all comments, staff applied edits to the update strategy. With the edited update strategy, staff ultimately received final consensus and input on the broad strategy concepts and began to draft the more technical draft ordinance language (the CAO). Input continued to be solicited from a broad section of interests and the public throughout the update process, including roundtable meetings with the Planning Commission, which played a large role in how Yakima County met State requirements for updating the CAO.~~

Commented [KW25]: This para. Is dated and does not effectively convey and outcome, remedy or relevant information. It is inarticulate, superfluous and is stricken.

Commented [KW26]: Edited for clarity, flow, sentence structure and grammatical precision.

Commented [KW27R26]: Corrected paragraph as follows:

Between May and August 2004, planning staff held a series of meetings with interest groups, local and State agency representatives, local government groups, a County-Wide Planning Policy Committee, and the Yakima County Planning Commission to solicit comments on the draft update strategy. Staff then compiled a list of all comments received for public review and applicable consideration.

Staff ultimately received final consensus and input on the broad strategy concepts and completed the draft critical area ordinance language. Final edits to the CAO were limited to those required by state law, or those necessary to incorporate Best Available Science (BAS).

The 2017 update of the CAO took a more simplistic approach than the 2007 CAO update. Text edits to the CAO were limited to those required by state law, or those necessary to accommodate changes in Best Available Science (BAS).

Since a good deal of Yakima County's critical areas, like floodplains, wetlands and important habitat, lie along our numerous stream corridors, the focus of the CAO is to protect these "hydrologically related critical areas." The stream corridor and other hydrologically related critical areas are designated critical areas and include one or more of the following features:

- (1) Any floodway and floodplain identified as a special flood hazard area. Special flood hazard areas are those identified by the Federal Insurance Administration in the Flood Insurance Study for Yakima County which, together with accompanying Flood Insurance Rate Maps and frequently flooded areas are hereby adopted by reference and declared to be a part of this title as set forth in Chapters 16C.05.20 through 16C.05.72;
- (2) Perennial and intermittent streams, excluding ephemeral streams, including the stream main channel and all secondary channels within the Ordinary High Water Mark;
- (3) Naturally occurring ponds under twenty acres and their submerged aquatic beds; and man-made lakes and ponds created within a stream channel designated under (2) above;
- (4) All wetlands, that meet the definition found in Section 16C.02.425, as required by WAC 365-190-080(1), and as designated in Section 16C.07.02(1) of the wetland chapter;
- (5) Where specifically cited, any flood-prone area not included in a designated floodway and floodplain, but indicated as flood-prone by U.S. Soil Conservation Service soil survey data or geologic evidence developed through professional geologists or engineers (i.e. specific flood frequency, stream channel migration), by information observable in the field such as soils or geological evidence, or by materials such as flood studies, topographic surveys, photographic evidence or other data;
- (6) A buffer area extending on a horizontal plane from the ordinary high water mark of a stream channel, lake, or pond, designated in this section or from the edge of a wetland designated in this section according to the distances set forth in Section 16C.06.16 (Vegetative Buffers).

Each stream in the County is typed according to their relative function and value into a five tiered ranking system. Type 1 Streams and Shoreline lakes and ponds are protected by the County's Shoreline Master Program (SMP). Vegetative buffers along the other four stream types vary according to their size with Type 5 streams (drains) having no buffer requirements.

CAO-defined wetlands are classified by a system modeled after the Department of Ecology's four-tiered rating system. This allows the County to distinguish between the most environmentally significant wetlands (Type 1) and those minor wetlands having slight to moderate function and value (Type 4). Vegetative buffers have been established that relate to the wetland type and are used to protect them.

Commented [KW28]: Corrected:

Yakima County's critical areas, including floodplains, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, critical aquifers, and geologically unstable areas are associated with stream corridors. The focus of the CAO is to protect these "hydrologically related areas." These designated critical areas include one or more of the following features:

Commented [KW29]: check

Commented [KW30]: Corrected:

Rivers, Lakes and Streams in the County are categorized according to their relative ecological function and value and annual flow characteristics into a five tiered rank typing system. Type 1 Streams and Shoreline lakes and ponds are protected by the County's Shoreline Master Program (SMP). Vegetative (i.e., Riparian) and other setbacks along Type 2, 3 and 4 streams are set and classified according to their size and presence or absence of fish with Type 5 streams (intermittently flowing drains) having no setback requirements.

1 ~~As it was merged into the CAO, the County's 1985 Flood Hazard Ordinance was updated to meet~~
2 ~~minimum federal and state requirements to maintain eligibility in the National Flood Insurance~~
3 ~~Program. Development meeting the vegetative buffering requirements from nearby streams and~~
4 ~~wetlands, but that will still remain in the 100-year floodplain, are processed through the flood~~
5 ~~hazard permit system administered directly by the Building Department.~~

6 7 **2.4 MAJOR OPPORTUNITIES**

8 While Yakima County is rich in both natural and cultural resources, many related issues presently
9 confront us. Certain problems, such as air quality, will always be with us and will require our
10 constant attention. Other matters involve conflicts between resource uses and users, like the
11 effect of timber harvesting on late summer water supplies or irrigation water runoff degrading
12 in-stream water quality. These dilemmas are often so interrelated it's nearly impossible to deal
13 with them singularly. And still other concerns, as yet unknown, are likely to evolve over the
14 twenty year time frame of ~~Horizon 2040~~2046~~Horizon 2046~~. But if we develop and practice
15 principles that sustain our resources rather than weaken and neglect them, we'll be better
16 prepared to address the problems that face us.

17 18 **2.4.1 Critical Areas**

19 While many of the other major issues identified in this section are closely related to the
20 protection of critical areas, the administration and enforcement of the Critical Areas Ordinance
21 (CAO) and Shoreline Master Program (SMP) will be on-going in Yakima County. Yakima County
22 staff reviews proposed development to ensure that development does not negatively impact
23 critical areas. One major area of contention has been the intersection between agricultural
24 activities and critical areas. To address the issue, Yakima County opted into the Voluntary
25 Stewardship Program (VSP). The VSP removes regulatory requirements of agricultural activities
26 when they are within or adjacent to critical areas, and emphasizes non-regulatory protection of
27 critical areas. The VSP requires a workgroup comprised of various stakeholders to create a Work
28 Plan that identifies benchmarks in the protection and enhancement of critical areas. The Work
29 Plan is reviewed and approved or disapproved by the Washington State Conservation
30 Commission (WSCC). The benchmarks identified in the Work Plan and approved by WSCC must
31 be met, or agricultural activities will fall back under jurisdiction of the Critical Areas Ordinance.

32 33 **2.4.2 Water Supply**

34
35 As with much of the West, water in Yakima County serves competing, and often conflicting,
36 uses. Securing certainty in our water supply has become an urgent crisis over the past three
37 years as the County faces unprecedented challenges. Between 2023 and 2025, Yakima County
38 experienced three consecutive years of severe drought—the first time since 1992-1994 that
39 such sustained water scarcity has occurred. By September 2025, the Yakima Basin's five
40 reservoirs reached only 20% capacity, the lowest level since recordkeeping began in 1971.
41 Reliable access to water is necessary for direct human uses like household, agriculture,
42 commercial and industrial operations, and for indirect human needs such as habitat and
43 recreation. Climate change is fundamentally altering water availability, with reduced snowpack,

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earlier spring runoff, higher temperatures, and increased wildfire activity all threatening the County's water security over the next twenty years.

Today, irrigated agriculture remains the biggest user of water, supporting a \$4.5 billion agricultural economy that produces 71% of the nation's hops, 63% of apples, and 62% of cherries. Yakima County agriculture depends largely on irrigation surface water supplied by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Yakima Project. However, severe drought conditions have dramatically reduced water availability, with junior water rights holders receiving only 40-45% of their full allocations in 2025. The needs of other surface water uses, particularly those dealing with the protection and restoration of anadromous fish runs, have become more critical as low flows and high water temperatures threaten salmon and steelhead populations. Anadromous fish are those species that are born in fresh water and eventually migrate out to sea where they spend a large part of their life, returning to the fresh water stream in which they were hatched to reproduce. Along with the water needs of habitat, the demand for water to serve the County's growing urban and rural areas continues to increase, creating intensified competition for limited supplies.

The basin was characterized as over-appropriated in 1904 and Yakima Basin surface water rights were subsequently defined in concert with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation authorization of the Yakima Project in May of 1905, which is also the priority date of Reclamation's water rights in the Basin. More recent court cases have established that the Yakama Nation has a water right to maintain fish life as a result of the 1855 treaty with the United States, the priority date of that water right is "time immemorial". Since surface waters within the Yakima River Basin are over-appropriated, our dependence on groundwater for domestic uses is likely to continue and may intensify during drought periods. To sustain growth, every resident and jurisdiction within Yakima County must meet the ongoing challenge of protecting and managing increasingly scarce water resources.

It is now generally accepted that Yakima River basin surface water and groundwater are hydrologically connected. Rural domestic water supply is generally provided from groundwater sources (i.e., private wells). The withdrawal of water from these groundwater sources may have an adverse impact on senior water rights established before and including 1905. RCW 90.44.050 provides for the supply of rural domestic water through the use of "exempt wells," which can pump up to 5,000 gallons per day for residential use. Permit-exempt groundwater withdrawals don't require a water right permit. However, to the extent the groundwater is beneficially used, the water user withdrawing groundwater under the exemption establishes a water right that enjoys the same privileges as a water right permit or certificate obtained directly from Washington State Department of Ecology. Though such withdrawals are "permit exempt," they are still subject to Washington State law regarding the seniority of water withdrawals.

Water use of any sort is subject to the "first in time, first in right" clause, originally established in historical western water law and now part of Washington State law. This means that a senior

right cannot be impaired by a junior right. Seniority is established by priority date—the date an application was filed for a permitted or certificated water right or the date that water was first put to beneficial use in the case of claims and exempt groundwater withdrawals. Although exempt groundwater withdrawals don't require a water right permit, they are always subject to state water law. In some instances, Ecology has had to regulate, stop or reduce groundwater withdrawals when they interfere with prior or "senior" water rights, including instream flow rules. During the recent drought years, these conflicts between groundwater withdrawals and senior surface water rights have become more acute as reduced streamflows threaten both agricultural diversions and fish habitat.

The 2023-2025 drought crisis has exposed the vulnerability of the County's water supply system. May-June 2025 was the driest period on record in Yakima and Kittitas counties, with the basin receiving less than 5% of normal precipitation over a 60-day period. Temperatures ran 2-4°F above normal, accelerating evaporation and crop water demand. Snowpack in the Central Cascades failed to adequately fill reservoirs, leaving them at only 35% of typical levels entering the 2025 irrigation season. Many farmers were forced to fallow fields, reduce plantings, or face complete crop failure, with estimated economic losses between \$161-\$424 million and over 6,000 jobs at risk. Irrigation districts such as Roza shut off water supplies for extended periods, and some agricultural operations have permanently closed. Low streamflows and elevated water temperatures have caused fish stranding, migration barriers, and increased mortality for threatened salmon populations. The combined pressures of drought, increased wildfire activity degrading watersheds, and climate-driven shifts in precipitation timing create compounding risks for all water users.

Climate projections indicate these challenges will intensify. Washington State Department of Ecology officials have characterized the current conditions as "the new normal," with more rain, less snowpack, earlier springs, hotter and drier summers, and an expectation that snow droughts will occur in four out of every ten years. Six of the last ten years have required drought declarations for some part of Washington State. Recent State Court decisions on Washington State Growth Management Act requirements have created a positive duty for Yakima County to ensure that water for development is legally and physically available. Closure of portions of the Yakima Basin to exempt well construction has already occurred in neighboring Kittitas County, significantly affecting development patterns and property values. Therefore, Yakima County must secure future domestic water supply for its projected rural population growth while simultaneously addressing agricultural water needs, fish habitat protection, wildfire recovery, and flood management in an era of unprecedented climate variability. The County's Water Resource System (YCWRS), described in detail in the Utilities Element of Horizon 2046, represents one strategic response to these interconnected water supply challenges.

~~As with much of the West, water in Yakima County serves competing, and often conflicting, uses. Securing certainty in our water supply will be a major issue over the next twenty years. Reliable~~

access to water is necessary for direct human uses like household, agriculture, commercial and industrial operations, and for indirect human needs such as habitat and recreation.

Today, irrigated agriculture is the biggest user of water. Yakima County agriculture depends largely on irrigation surface water supplied U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Yakima Project. But recently the needs of other surface water uses, particularly those dealing with the protection and restoration of anadromous fish runs, have been argued. Anadromous fish are those species, like salmon and steelhead that are born in fresh water and eventually migrate out to sea where they spend a large part of their life, returning to the fresh water stream in which they were hatched in order to reproduce. Along with the water needs of habitat, the demand for water to serve the County's growing urban and rural areas will significantly increase.

The basin was characterized as over-appropriated in 1904 and Yakima Basin surface water rights were subsequently defined in concert with the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation authorization of the Yakima Project in May of 1905, which is also the priority date of Reclamation's water rights in the Basin. More recent court cases have established that the Yakama Nation has a water right to maintain fish life as a result of the 1855 treaty with the United States, the priority date of that water right is "time immemorial". Since surface waters within the Yakima River Basin are over appropriated, our dependence on ground water for our domestic uses is likely to continue. To sustain growth, every resident and jurisdiction within Yakima County must meet the ongoing challenge of protecting and managing our water resources.

It is now generally accepted that Yakima River basin surface water and ground water are hydrologically connected. Rural domestic water supply is generally provided from groundwater sources (i.e. private wells). The withdrawal of water from these groundwater sources may have an adverse impact on senior water rights established before and including 1905. RCW 90.44.050 provides for the supply of rural domestic water through the use of "exempt wells", which can pump up to 5,000 gallons per day for residential use. Permit exempt groundwater withdrawals don't require a water right permit. However, to the extent the groundwater is beneficially used, the water user withdrawing groundwater under the exemption establishes a water right that enjoys the same privileges as a water right permit or certificate obtained directly from Washington State Department of Ecology. Though such withdrawals are "permit exempt", they are still subject to Washington State law regarding the seniority of water withdrawals.

Water use of any sort is subject to the "first in time, first in right" clause, originally established in historical western water law and now part of Washington State law. This means that a senior right cannot be impaired by a junior right. Seniority is established by priority date—the date an application was filed for a permitted or certificated water right or the date that water was first put to beneficial use in the case of claims and exempt groundwater withdrawals. Although exempt groundwater withdrawals don't require a water right permit, they are always subject to state water law. In some instances, Ecology has had to regulate, stop or reduce groundwater withdrawals when they interfere with prior or "senior" water rights, including instream flow rules.

Recent State Court decisions on the requirements of the Washington State Growth Management Act and County Land Use plans result in a positive duty for Yakima County to ensure that water for development is legally and physically available. Closure of the portions of the Yakima Basin to exempt well construction has already occurred in Kittitas County, which in turn has had effects on the development patterns and a large effect on the value and marketability of legal lots which can no longer be developed with the use of exempt wells. Therefore, Yakima County must secure future domestic water supply for its projected rural population growth.

On December 10, 2013, in anticipation of the possibility that the Department of Ecology might, by rule, declare the unavailability of water for development in Yakima County, the Yakima County Board of Commissioners adopted Resolution 399-2013, "In the Matter of the Formation of the Yakima County Water Resource System." Yakima County's Water Resource System (YCWRS) expands its current water systems to address a County wide rural domestic water supply to be available to those who would otherwise rely on the "exempt" well strategy offered by RCW 90.44.050. Yakima County understands that groundwater withdrawal may have effects on senior water rights, including the Yakama Nation Water right for the protection of fish life. Thus, the potential effects of future groundwater withdrawals on senior water users and habitat conditions have been addressed by the County in the technical report title "Assessment of the Availability of Groundwater for Residential Development in the Rural Parts of Yakima County," which was completed on January 2016. The report identifies mitigation strategies for providing water for rural development, while avoiding impacts to flows in main stem reaches and tributaries. To implement the strategies identified in the report the County has developed the Yakima County's Water Resource System (YCWRS). A more detailed description of Yakima County Water Resource System is outlined in the Utilities Element of **Horizon 2040**.

2.4.3 Water Quality

The water quality of our streams, lakes, and ground water influences the domestic, economic, recreational, and natural environments of Yakima County. We all need clean water for daily use in our homes. Residents and tourists alike use our lakes and streams extensively for recreational activities such as boating, fishing, and swimming. Many industries require clean water for manufacturing processes. Some uses, such as commercial fishing and fish hatcheries, are dependent on a constant source of high quality water. As growth and development have increased, so have the problems associated with maintaining water quality. A specific area of water quality concern is in the Lower Yakima Valley, where high levels of nitrates have contaminated drinking water supplies.

In 2011, the Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Advisory Committee (GWAC) developed a Groundwater Management Area program which is a multi-agency, citizen-based, coordinated effort to reduce groundwater nitrate contamination in the lower Yakima Valley. Yakima County, as the GWMA lead agency under RCW 173-100-080, was responsible for development of the program that shows the responsibilities and roles of each of the advisory committee members as agreed upon by the committee. The GWAC was responsible for overseeing the development of the program. The primary goal of the GWMA is to reduce concentrations of nitrate in

Commented [KW31]: Replace with YBIP language

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~~groundwater to below Washington State drinking water standards. The program objectives have been divided into six key categories: data and monitoring, problem identification, measures to reduce groundwater contamination, education, drinking water systems and other general objectives. The GWMA is currently working towards the development of best management practices (BMPs) and strategies for implementing those BMPs such as technical assistance, education, ordinances, support enforcement of new and existing laws and ordinances and the coordination with other regulatory and nonregulatory programs. The anticipated conclusion of the GWMA is 2018.~~

The water quality of our streams, lakes, and groundwater influences the domestic, economic, recreational, and natural environments of Yakima County. Many industries require clean water for manufacturing processes. As growth and development have increased, so have the problems associated with maintaining water quality, while the three consecutive years of severe drought (2023-2025) have intensified water quality challenges through reduced streamflows, elevated water temperatures, and concentrated pollutant loads that threaten both human health and aquatic ecosystems.

A critical area of ongoing water quality concern is in the Lower Yakima Valley. In 2012, the Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Advisory Committee (GWAC) was established. In 2019, the GWAC adopted 64 recommendations to reduce nitrate loading and meet drinking water standards, and the Washington State Department of Ecology certified the plan, which continues implementation through partnerships involving federal, state, tribal, county, and local health agencies to protect public health while addressing the complex sources of contamination. In December 2024, a U.S. District Court ordered three dairies in the Lower Yakima Valley to test drinking water wells within 3.5 miles downgradient of their operations and provide alternative water sources where nitrate levels exceed drinking water standards, reflecting ongoing enforcement efforts to protect communities from contamination sources.

Beyond nitrate contamination, water quality in the Yakima Basin faces intensifying challenges from elevated water temperatures, particularly during the summer months when drought conditions reduce streamflows and increase thermal stress on aquatic life. During the 2024 drought, water temperatures in the lower Yakima River approached record highs in the 80s Fahrenheit, creating thermal barriers that prevent salmon and steelhead from migrating between the ocean and spawning habitats. These extreme temperatures cause fish stranding, increased predation, blocked migration routes, and elevated mortality rates for threatened and endangered species including sockeye salmon, steelhead, coho salmon, and federally protected bull trout. Low flows combined with high water temperatures compromise dissolved oxygen levels, concentrate pollutants, and degrade critical spawning and rearing habitats that are essential to both the cultural traditions of the Yakama Nation under the 1855 Treaty and the region's recreational fishing industry.

Climate variability and the shift from snow-dominant to rain-dominant precipitation patterns are fundamentally altering the basin's hydrologic regime and water quality dynamics. Earlier

1 [snowmelt, extended low-flow periods during summer, and reduced cold-water refuges for](#)
2 [migrating fish compound the effects of chronic water quality stressors. In response to these](#)
3 [interconnected challenges, the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan \(YBIP\)—a collaboration of state,](#)
4 [federal, tribal, business, and community organizations—provides a comprehensive 30-year](#)
5 [strategy to address water supply, fishery habitat, and environmental variability challenges. YBIP](#)
6 [projects include fish passage construction at Cle Elum Dam \(enabling sockeye reintroduction\),](#)
7 [habitat restoration efforts totaling more than \\$10 million in current and planned projects,](#)
8 [riparian tree and shrub planting to provide stream shading, cold-water refuge establishment,](#)
9 [removal of invasive aquatic vegetation, acquisition of watershed conservation lands, and](#)
10 [implementation of pulse flows to aid fish migration. These integrated efforts recognize that water](#)
11 [quality cannot be separated from water quantity, habitat connectivity, and landscape-scale](#)
12 [watershed health.](#)

13
14 [Maintaining and improving water quality requires coordinated monitoring, research, and](#)
15 [adaptive management across the basin. The Washington State Department of Ecology conducts](#)
16 [ongoing water quality monitoring for temperature, dissolved oxygen, and pH to assess aquatic](#)
17 [life conditions and track compliance with water quality standards. The U.S. Geological Survey](#)
18 [provides groundwater availability modeling for the lower Yakima Basin to guide management](#)
19 [decisions and future emergency drought well authorizations. Conservation districts lead on-the-](#)
20 [ground implementation of best management practices including dust control, efficient irrigation](#)
21 [systems, nutrient management, conservation tillage, and riparian management zones reduce](#)
22 [nonpoint source pollution from agricultural operations. The Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency](#)
23 [addresses air quality impacts that indirectly affect water quality through atmospheric deposition.](#)
24 [Yakima Health District provides public health surveillance, well testing programs, and community](#)
25 [education about water quality risks and protective measures.](#)

26
27 [Looking forward, Yakima County must integrate water quality protection into all planning and](#)
28 [development decisions, recognizing that land use patterns, stormwater management,](#)
29 [wastewater treatment, agricultural practices, and urban growth all influence the quality of](#)
30 [surface water and groundwater throughout the basin. Development standards should require](#)
31 [low-impact development techniques, green infrastructure, and source control measures that](#)
32 [prevent pollutant loading to receiving waters. Septic system regulations must ensure proper](#)
33 [siting, construction, and maintenance to prevent groundwater contamination. Agricultural](#)
34 [support programs should provide technical and financial assistance for adoption of precision](#)
35 [agriculture technologies, soil health practices, and nutrient management plans that minimize](#)
36 [fertilizer applications while maintaining productivity. Riparian corridor protection through critical](#)
37 [areas regulations preserves natural filtration, temperature moderation, and habitat functions](#)
38 [that are essential to water quality. Emergency preparedness planning must address water quality](#)
39 [degradation during drought periods and coordinate response efforts among county agencies,](#)
40 [health districts, water purveyors, irrigation districts, and state and federal partners. Through](#)
41 [these integrated approaches—combining regulatory oversight, voluntary stewardship, technical](#)
42 [assistance, monitoring and research, emergency response, and multi-stakeholder](#)

collaboration—Yakima County can work toward the goal of clean, safe, and abundant water for all beneficial uses even as environmental pressures intensify in the decades ahead.

2.4.4 Air Quality

~~We all contribute to air quality problems. Our daily lives are filled with single person car trips, smoke from woodstoves and the burning of brush and yard wastes. More traffic on gravel roads increases dust for residents and agricultural operations. Commercial and industrial operations also contribute to air quality problems, but the primary source of air pollution in Yakima County is motor vehicles. Although state and federal laws regulate some emissions, however, air pollution will increase as the population grows. Our challenge is to maintain or improve air quality as growth continues, particularly within urban areas. To that end, Yakima County works closely with the Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency to improve the quality of our air and minimize potential impacts resulting from development.~~

Air quality in Yakima County faces mounting challenges from multiple sources, with wildfire smoke emerging as a critical and increasingly frequent threat to public health and quality of life. Between 2024 and 2025, the region experienced extended air quality alerts due to wildfire smoke from regional fires including the Western Pines Fire, Pomas Fire, and Hope Fire. These smoke events, combined with the County's semi-arid climate and geography, create complex air quality challenges that demand coordinated action across all sectors. While we all contribute to air quality problems through our daily activities, the convergence of prolonged drought conditions and increased wildfire activity has fundamentally altered the region's air quality landscape and requires adaptive management strategies for the decades ahead.

Our daily lives are filled with actions that degrade air quality: single-person car trips, smoke from woodstoves and the burning of brush and yard wastes, and increased dust from traffic on gravel roads affecting both residents and agricultural operations. Commercial and industrial operations also contribute to air quality problems, but the primary source of traditional air pollution in Yakima County remains motor vehicles. Although state and federal laws regulate some emissions, air pollution from conventional sources will increase as the population grows. However, wildfire smoke has emerged as an episodic but severe air quality threat that can overwhelm all other sources during fire season, with particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10) reaching hazardous levels that force residents to shelter indoors, close schools and businesses, and threaten vulnerable populations including children, elderly residents, and those with respiratory conditions.

The challenge of maintaining or improving air quality as growth continues is now compounded by environmental changes that require comprehensive resiliency and sustainability planning. The three consecutive years of severe drought (2023-2025), combined with temperatures 2-4°F above normal and reduced snowpack, have created conditions where four out of every ten years may experience drought conditions conducive to wildfire. Dried vegetation from prolonged drought becomes fuel for more frequent and intense wildfires, while earlier snowmelt and longer fire seasons extend the period of wildfire risk. These environmental impacts create a feedback loop: drought stresses vegetation, increasing wildfire fuel loads; wildfires degrade watersheds

Commented [KW34]: There is nothing here of substance. Cite the YRCAA "plan" and adopt? ID Climate Change GHG reduction actions in the Transportation Element? Wildfire prevention also, so adopt Wildlife Urban Interface and Firewise + any other YC and DOI programs. Work to do here.

1 [and vegetation, reducing the landscape's resilience; and smoke from fires creates acute air](#)
2 [quality crises that can persist for weeks. Addressing air quality therefore requires integrated](#)
3 [strategies that reduce emissions from traditional sources while simultaneously building](#)
4 [community resilience to wildfire through prevention, preparedness, and post-fire recovery.](#)

5
6 [Yakima County works closely with the Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency \(YRCAA\) to regulate air](#)
7 [pollution from stationary sources, monitor air quality conditions, and implement programs that](#)
8 [protect public health. YRCAA's comprehensive regulatory framework includes New Source](#)
9 [Review permitting requirements, source registration and testing procedures, dust control](#)
10 [requirements, residential wood smoke reduction programs, asbestos control, and outdoor](#)
11 [burning permit systems. The County and YRCAA have adopted updated air quality regulations](#)
12 [approved by the Environmental Protection Agency and incorporated into Washington's State](#)
13 [Implementation Plan, ensuring compliance with federal Clean Air Act standards while addressing](#)
14 [local conditions. YRCAA operates real-time air quality monitoring stations in downtown Yakima](#)
15 [and Sunnyside, providing hourly particulate matter measurements that inform public health](#)
16 [advisories and burn bans when air quality deteriorates.](#)

17
18 [To address wildfire threats in the wildland-urban interface \(WUI\)—areas where homes are built](#)
19 [near or among lands prone to wildfire—Yakima County has adopted the International Wildland-](#)
20 [Urban Interface Code and established comprehensive wildfire prevention and preparedness](#)
21 [programs. Studies show that as many as 80 percent of homes lost to wildfire could have been](#)
22 [saved if brush around homes were cleared and defensible space created around structures. The](#)
23 [County's Fire Marshal's Office provides fire and life safety services including wildland-urban](#)
24 [interface management, fire prevention education, and enforcement of fire safety standards.](#)
25 [Annual burn bans, typically covering June through September depending on fire danger, restrict](#)
26 [outdoor burning during high-risk periods to prevent fire ignitions that could quickly spread under](#)
27 [drought conditions.](#)

28
29 [The Yakima County Community Wildfire Protection Plan \(CWPP\), approved by the Board of](#)
30 [Commissioners in 2015 and endorsed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources,](#)
31 [provides a strategic framework for reducing wildfire risks to people, structures, infrastructure,](#)
32 [and ecosystems. Developed through the Yakima Valley Fire Adapted Communities Coalition](#)
33 [\(YVFACC\)—a partnership uniting residents, emergency responders, land managers, business](#)
34 [owners, and developers—the CWPP identifies high-risk areas, prioritizes fuel reduction projects,](#)
35 [and establishes collaborative implementation strategies. The plan integrates with the National](#)
36 [Fire Plan, Healthy Forests Restoration Act, Disaster Mitigation Act, and National Cohesive](#)
37 [Wildland Fire Management Strategy, while recognizing local budgets, personnel, and equipment](#)
38 [constraints. Goals include engaging communities in wildfire preparedness, implementing](#)
39 [vegetation management projects that promote natural fire regimes, improving fire department](#)
40 [response capabilities, and deterring unmitigated development in high fire risk areas through](#)
41 [strategic planning and protection measures.](#)
42

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Community-based wildfire risk reduction programs provide direct assistance to property owners in high-risk areas. The North Yakima Conservation District, in cooperation with the Highway 410/12 Community Wildfire Protection Plan steering committee, conducts Firewise home assessments that provide landowners with specific actions to reduce wildfire risk on their property. The program promotes fuels reduction, creation of defensible space around structures, removal of ladder fuels that allow fire to climb into tree crowns, and pruning and thinning to reduce fire intensity. The conservation district provides chipping services for cut vegetation, making it easier for property owners to remove hazardous fuels. Yakima County residents are encouraged to join the Firewise Communities/USA Recognition program, which empowers neighborhoods to take collective action to reduce wildfire vulnerability through coordinated landscape management, community education, and implementation of science-based fire protection measures. These community-level efforts, combined with agency vegetation management on public lands, create a network of fire-adapted communities more resilient to inevitable wildfire events.

Looking forward, Yakima County's resiliency and sustainability planning must integrate air quality improvement strategies into all planning efforts, as required by Washington State's Growth Management Act. Transportation planning should identify strategies to reduce vehicle miles traveled, promote alternative transportation modes, and design compact, walkable communities that reduce vehicle emissions while improving quality of life. Building codes and development standards should encourage energy-efficient construction and low-emission heating systems that improve local air quality and reduce particulate pollution from woodstoves and other residential heating sources. Agricultural best management practices should address dust control from field operations, efficient fertilizer application to reduce ammonia emissions, and conservation tillage practices that improve soil health while reducing particulate emissions. Coordination between the County, YRCAA, fire districts, conservation districts, health department, emergency management, and community organizations creates the collaborative framework necessary to protect air quality through both day-to-day emission reductions and emergency response to episodic wildfire smoke events that increasingly define summer air quality conditions in Yakima County.

~~2.4.5 The Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat~~

~~Statewide, much of the historical fish and wildlife habitat has been lost to habitat conversion. In the Columbia Basin, over half of the historical extent of shrub-steppe has been converted by development or crop production and in some eastern Washington counties as much as 75 percent of the historical extent of shrub-steppe has been lost. The shrub-steppe habitats that remain are often fragmented and degraded by frequent fires and invasive weeds such as cheatgrass. Due to its ability to support rich agricultural use, the deep soil shrub-steppe communities that many priority wildlife species depend on have been disproportionately converted at a higher rate than other shrub-steppe communities.~~

Commented [KW35]: Update with ESA recovery plan and any YK coho/sockeye information

Commented [KW36]: Run by WDFW

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~~The riparian management zones that line the regional rivers and streams are critically important to our regional fish and wildlife species, comprising one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in Washington State. Historically an estimated 900,000 adult anadromous fish returned to the Yakima River Basin annually, ranking second only to Idaho's Snake River. But as more of our natural resources have been put to use, the number and types of anadromous fish have rapidly declined. By the 1920's, the once awe-inspiring fish runs had dwindled to less than one percent of their historical numbers. Coho salmon became extirpated in the Yakima Basin in the early 1980's, and sockeye were extirpated from the Yakima River in the early 1900's with the construction of irrigation dams on the Keechelus, Kachess, Cle Elum, and Bumping lakes. Sockeye require lakes to spawn to as part of their life history, and when the dams were constructed without access, the sockeye were extirpated in the Yakima River Basin.~~

~~In the Yakima Basin, these riparian management zones have been reduced to narrow corridors, reducing the functionality of the riparian areas for both the fish and wildlife species that depend on them. Reduction of these corridors have resulted in reduced aquatic habitat for our important fish species and reduced breeding, wintering and migration habitat for wildlife. Reduction of these management zones increases pressure on the border between the riparian zones and other land use activities in the adjacent uplands with many wildlife species becoming stressed or disappearing due to the decreased riparian management zones.~~

~~Meanwhile, as wildlife and the habitat they need declines, our culture's recreational and land use activities that impact riparian and upland habitats have greatly increased. As demands on fish and wildlife habitat grow in light of our growing communities, to maintain functional fish and wildlife populations we need to maintain core areas of both upland and aquatic habitat while also ensuring that connectivity corridors exist through more heavily used areas to allow healthy populations of fish and wildlife species to maintain and thrive in Yakima County and the Yakima Basin.~~

2.4.5.1 Priority Habitats and Species List (PHS)

~~The PHS List is a catalog of habitats and species considered to be priorities for conservation and management. Priority species require protective measures for their survival due to their population status, sensitivity to habitat alteration, and/or recreational, commercial, or tribal importance. Priority species include State Endangered, Threatened, Sensitive, and Candidate species; animal aggregations (e.g., heron colonies, bat colonies) considered vulnerable; and species of recreational, commercial, or tribal importance that are vulnerable.~~

~~Priority habitats are habitat types or elements with unique or significant value to a diverse assemblage of species. A priority habitat may consist of a unique vegetation type (e.g., shrub-steppe) or dominant plant species (e.g., juniper savannah), a described successional stage (e.g., old-growth forest), or a specific habitat feature (e.g., cliffs).~~

~~In general, areas of priority habitats of greater importance to fish or wildlife tend to have one or more of these characteristics:~~

Commented [KW38]: Is this term used in YCC? RMZ?

Commented [KW39R38]: Interaction with CMZ, Shorelines, wetlands etc. setbacks and development code restrictions.

Commented [KW40]: Check and Update w/ YN and WDFW

Commented [KW41]: Pull new PHS listing and info

- Habitat areas that are larger are generally better than areas that are smaller,
- Habitat areas that are more structurally complex (e.g., multiple canopy layers, snags, geologically diverse) are generally better than areas that are simple,
- Habitat areas that contain native habitat types adjacent to one another are better than isolated habitats (especially aquatic associated with terrestrial habitat),
- Habitat areas that are connected are generally better than areas that are isolated,
- Habitat areas that have maintained their historical processes (e.g., historical fire regimes) are generally better than areas lacking such processes.

Table 2.4.5.1-1 below represents the PHS list (updated 2016) for Yakima County.

	<u>SPECIES/ HABITATS</u>	<u>STATE STATUS</u>	<u>FEDERAL STATUS</u>
<u>Habitats</u>	Aspen Stands		
	Biodiversity Areas & Corridors	-	
	Eastside Steppe	-	
	Inland Dunes	-	
	Old-Growth/Mature Forest	-	
	Oregon White Oak Woodlands	-	
	Riparian	-	
	Shrub steppe	-	
	Freshwater Wetlands & Fresh Deepwater	-	
	Instream	-	
	Caves	-	
	Cliffs	-	
	Snags and Logs	-	
	Talus	-	-
<u>Fishes</u>	Pacific Lamprey	-	-
	River Lamprey	Candidate	-

	<u>SPECIES/ HABITATS</u>	<u>STATE STATUS</u>	<u>FEDERAL STATUS</u>
	White Sturgeon	-	-
	Leopard Dace	Candidate	-
	Umatilla Dace	Candidate	-
	Mountain Sucker	Candidate	-
	Bull Trout/ Dolly Varden	Candidate *	Threatened *
	Chinook Salmon	-	Threatened (Upper Columbia Spring run is Endangered)
	Coho Salmon	-	Threatened – Lower Columbia
	Kokanee	-	-
	Rainbow Trout/ Steelhead/ Inland Redband Trout	Candidate **	Threatened **
	Sockeye Salmon	-	Threatened – Ozette Lake Endangered – Snake River
	Westslope Cutthroat Trout	-	-
Amphibians	Cascade Torrent Salamander	Candidate	-
	Larch Mountain Salamander	Sensitive	-
	Van Dyke's Salamander	Candidate	-
	Columbia Spotted Frog	Candidate	-
	Western Toad	Candidate	-

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	<u>SPECIES/ HABITATS</u>	<u>STATE STATUS</u>	<u>FEDERAL STATUS</u>
<u>Reptiles</u>	<u>Sharp-tailed Snake</u> (formerly Common Sharptail Snake)	<u>Candidate</u>	-
	<u>Striped Whipsnake</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	-
	<u>Sagebrush Lizard</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	-
<u>Birds</u>	<u>Western grebe</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	-
	<u>E WA breeding concentrations of:</u> <u>Grebes, Cormorants</u>	-	-
	<u>E WA breeding: Terns</u>	-	-
	<u>Black-crowned Night-heron</u>	-	-
	<u>Great Blue Heron</u>	-	-
	<u>Cavity-nesting ducks: Wood Duck,</u> <u>Barrow's Goldeneye, Common</u> <u>Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Hooded</u> <u>Merganser</u>	-	-
	<u>Harlequin Duck</u>	-	-
	<u>Tundra Swan</u>	-	-
	<u>Waterfowl Concentrations</u>	-	-
	<u>Ferruginous Hawk</u>	<u>Endangered</u>	-
	<u>Golden Eagle</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	-
	<u>Northern Goshawk</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	-
	<u>Prairie Falcon</u>	-	-

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	<u>SPECIES/ HABITATS</u>	<u>STATE STATUS</u>	<u>FEDERAL STATUS</u>
	Chukar	-	-
	Ring-necked Pheasant	-	-
	Greater Sage-grouse	Endangered	-
	Sooty Grouse	-	-
	Wild Turkey	-	-
	Sandhill Crane	Endangered	-
	E WA breeding occurrences of: Phalaropes, Stilts and Avocets	-	-
	Band-tailed Pigeon	-	-
	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Endangered	Threatened
	Burrowing Owl	candidate	-
	Flammulated Owl	Candidate	-
	Northern Spotted Owl (formerly called Spotted Owl)	Endangered	Threatened
	Vaux's Swift	-	-
	Black-backed Woodpecker	Candidate	-
	White-headed Woodpecker	Candidate	-
	Loggerhead Shrike	Candidate	-

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	<u>SPECIES/ HABITATS</u>	<u>STATE STATUS</u>	<u>FEDERAL STATUS</u>
	Sagebrush Sparrow (formerly Sage Sparrow)	Candidate	-
	Sage Thrasher	Candidate	-
Mammals	Roosting Concentrations of: Big-brown Bat, Myotis bats, Pallid Bat	-	-
	Townsend's Big-eared Bat	Candidate	-
	Black-tailed Jackrabbit	Candidate	-
	White-tailed Jackrabbit	Candidate	-
	Western Gray Squirrel	Endangered	-
	Townsend's Ground Squirrel	Candidate	-
	Cascade Red Fox	Endangered	-
	Fisher	Endangered	-
	Marten	-	-
	Wolverine	Candidate	Threatened
	Gray Wolf	Endangered	Endangered: only in Western two-thirds of Washington
	Bighorn Sheep	-	-
	Columbian Black-tailed Deer	-	-
	Mountain Goat	-	-

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	<u>SPECIES/ HABITATS</u>	<u>STATE STATUS</u>	<u>FEDERAL STATUS</u>
	Northwest White-tailed Deer	-	-
	Elk	-	-
	Mule Deer (formerly called Rocky Mountain Mule Deer)	-	-
Invertebrates	Columbia Oregonian	Candidate	-
	Western Bumble Bee	Candidate	Candidate
	Mardon Skipper	Endangered	-
	Monarch	Candidate	Candidate
	Silver-bordered Fritillary	Candidate	-
		** Steelhead Only	
		* Bull Trout only	
<p>These are the species and habitats identified for Yakima County. This list of species and habitats was developed using the distribution maps found in the Priority Habitat and Species (PHS) List (see http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/).</p> <p>Species distribution maps depict counties where each priority species is known to occur as well as other counties where habitat primarily associated with the species exists.</p> <p>Two assumptions were made when developing distribution maps for each species:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a high likelihood a species is present in a county, even if it has not been directly observed, if the habitat with which it is primarily associated exists. 2. Over time, species can naturally change their distribution and move to new counties where usable habitat exists. <p>Distribution maps in the PHS List were developed using the best information available. As new information becomes available, known distribution for some species may expand or contract. WDFW will periodically review and update the distribution maps in PHS list.</p>			

Table 2.4.5.1-1 Priority Habitat and Species in Yakima County

Priority Habitats			
Habitat	Priority Area		
— Aspen Stands	— Pure or mixed stands greater than 1 acre		
— Biodiversity Areas & Corridors	-		
— Inland Dunes	-		
— Old Growth/Mature Forest	-		
— Oregon White Oak Woodlands	— Stands greater than 5 acres in size		
— Shrub Steppe	-		
— Riparian	-		
— Freshwater Wetlands & Fresh Deepwater	-		
— Instream	-		
Priority Habitat Features			
— Caves	-		
— Cliffs	— Greater than 25 feet high and occurring below 5000 ft.		
— Snags and Logs	-		
— Talus	-		
Fish			
Species	Priority Area	State Status	Federal Status
— Pacific Lamprey	Any Occurrence		Species of Concern
— River Lamprey	Any Occurrence	Candidate	Species of Concern
— White Sturgeon	Any Occurrence		
— Leopard Dace	Any Occurrence	Candidate	
— Umatilla Dace	Any Occurrence	Candidate	
— Mountain Sucker	Any Occurrence	Candidate	
— Bull Trout	Any Occurrence	Candidate	Threatened
— Chinook Salmon	Any Occurrence		
— Coho	Any Occurrence		
— Kokanee	Any Occurrence		
— Rainbow Trout/ Steelhead	Any Occurrence	Candidate *	Threatened *
— Sockeye Salmon	Any Occurrence		
— Westslope Cutthroat	Any Occurrence		
Reptiles and Amphibians			
Species	Priority Area	State Status	Federal Status
— Cascade Torrent Salamander	Any occurrence	Candidate	
— Larch Mountain Salamander	Any occurrence	Sensitive	Species of Concern
— Van Dyke's Salamander	Any occurrence	Candidate	Species of Concern
— Columbia Spotted Frog	Any occurrence	Candidate	
— Western Toad	Any occurrence	Candidate	Species of Concern
— Common Sharp-tailed Snake	Any occurrence	Candidate	Species of Concern
— Striped Whipsnake	Any occurrence	Candidate	
— Sagebrush Lizard	Any occurrence	Candidate	Species of Concern
Birds			
Species	Priority Area	State Status	Federal Status
— Western Grebe	Regular concentrations, Breeding areas, Migratory stopovers, Regular occurrences in winter	Candidate	-
— E WA Breeding Concentrations of: Grebes, Cormorants	Breeding areas	-	-

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—E-WA Breeding Terns	Breeding areas	-	-
—Black-Crowned Night Heron	Breeding areas	-	-
—Great Blue Heron	Breeding areas	-	-
—Cavity-Nesting Ducks: Wood Duck,	Breeding areas	-	-
—Barrow's Goldeneye, Common			
—Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Hooded			
—Merganser			
—Harlequin Duck	Breeding areas	-	-
—Tundra Swan	Regular concentrations		
—Waterfowl Concentrations	Significant breeding areas, Regular concentrations in winter		
—Bald Eagle	Breeding areas, Communal roosts, Regular concentrations	Sensitive	Species of Concern
—Ferruginous Hawk	Breeding areas, including alternate nest sites. If breeding area is not known, approximate with a 7.0 km² (4.35 mi²) area around known nest sites, foraging areas	Threatened	Species of Concern
—Golden Eagle	Breeding and foraging areas	Candidate	-
—Northern Goshawk	Breeding areas, including alternate nest sites, post-fledging foraging areas	Candidate	Species of Concern
—Peregrine Falcon	Breeding areas, Regular occurrence	Sensitive	Species of Concern
—Prairie Falcon	Breeding areas	-	-
—Chukar	Regular concentrations in WDFW primary management zones for chukar	-	-
—Ring Necked Pheasant	Self-sustaining birds observed in regular concentrations in WDFW's eastern Washington Primary Management Zone for pheasant	-	-
—Sage Grouse	Breeding areas, leks, Regular concentrations	Threatened	Candidate
—Sooty Grouse	Breeding areas, Regular concentrations	-	-
—Wild Turkey	Regular concentrations and roosts in WDFW's Primary Management Zones for wild turkeys	-	-
—Sandhill Crane	Breeding areas, Regular concentrations, migration staging areas	Endangered	-

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Natural Settings Element

—E-WA Breeding Occurrences of:	Breeding areas	-	-
—Phalaropes, Stilts and Avocets			
—Band-Tailed Pigeon	Regular concentrations; Occupied mineral sites	-	-
—Yellow-Billed Cuckoo	Any occurrence	Candidate	Candidate
—Burrowing Owl	Breeding areas, foraging areas, Regular concentrations	Candidate	Species of Concern
—Flammulated Owl	Breeding sites, Regular occurrences	Candidate	-
—Spotted Owl	Any occurrence	Endangered	Threatened
—Vaux's Swift	Breeding areas, Communal roosts	Candidate	-
—Black-Backed Woodpecker	Breeding areas, Regular occurrences	Candidate	-
—Lewis' Woodpecker	Breeding areas	Candidate	-
—Pileated Woodpecker	Breeding areas	Candidate	-
—White-Headed Woodpecker	Breeding sites, Regular occurrences	Candidate	-
—Loggerhead Shrike	Regular occurrences in breeding areas, Regular concentrations	Candidate	-
—Sage Sparrow	Breeding areas, Regular occurrences in suitable habitat during the breeding season	Candidate	-
—Sage Thrasher	Breeding areas, Regular occurrences in suitable habitat during the breeding season	Candidate	-

Mammals			
Species	Priority Area	State Status	Federal Status
—Merriam's Shrew	Any occurrence	Candidate	-
—Preble's Shrew	Any occurrence	Candidate	Species of Concern
—Roosting Concentrations of: Big-	Regular concentrations in	-	-
—Brown Bat, Myotis Bats, Pallid Bat	naturally occurring breeding areas and other communal roosts		
—Townsend's Big-Eared Bat	Any occurrence	Candidate	Species of Concern
—Black-Tailed Jackrabbit	Regular concentrations	Candidate	-
—White-Tailed Jackrabbit	Regular concentrations	Candidate	-
—Western Gray Squirrel	Any occurrence	Threatened	Species of Concern
—Townsend's Ground Squirrel	Breeding Area, Occurrence, Regular concentrations	Candidate	Species of Concern
—Cascade Red Fox	Any occurrence	Candidate	-
—Fisher	Any occurrence	Endangered	Candidate
—Marten	Regular occurrence	-	-
—Wolverine	Any occurrence	Candidate	-
—Bighorn Sheep	Breeding areas, Regular concentrations	-	-

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—Columbian Black-tailed Deer	Regular concentrations, Migration corridors	-	-
—Mountain Goat	Breeding areas, Regular concentrations	-	-
—Northwest White-tailed Deer	Migration corridors, Regular concentrations in winter	-	-
—Elk	Calving Areas, Migration Corridors, Regular concentrations in Winter and in foraging areas along coastal waters	-	-
—Rocky Mountain Mule Deer	Breeding areas, Migration corridors, Regular concentrations in winter	-	-

Invertebrates			
Species	Priority Area	State Status	Federal Status
—Mardon Skipper	Any occurrence	Endangered	Species of Concern
—Silver-Bordered Fritillary	Any occurrence	Candidate	-
*Steelhead only			

****Important Note****

These are the species and habitats identified for Yakima County. This list of species and habitats was developed using the distribution maps found in the Priority Habitat and Species (PHS) List (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/>). Species distribution maps depict counties where each priority species is known to occur as well as other counties where habitat primarily associated with the species exists. Two assumptions were made when developing distribution maps for each species:

1. There is a high likelihood a species is present in a county, even if it has not been directly observed, if the habitat with which it is primarily associated exists.
2. Over time, species can naturally change their distribution and move to new counties where usable habitat exists.

Distribution maps in the PHS List were developed using the best information available. As new information becomes available, known distribution for some species may expand or contract. WDFW will periodically review and update the distribution maps in PHS list.

2.5 EXISTING CONDITIONS

2.5.1 The Physical and Cultural Landscape

Yakima County contains an impressive array of landscapes. Ranging from the western snow fields of the Cascade Mountains to the arid basalt ridges of the east, the collective histories of these landscapes is what makes Yakima County such a vibrant place to live. The dynamic forces which shape our natural setting must be considered when planning for continued and sustained growth.

As we examine our natural setting, we must also explore its relationship to our manmade or cultural landscape. We often observe our assembled surroundings but we seldom think about them in terms of their ties to the natural environment. Our built-out environment is directly influenced by the ways in which we utilize our natural surroundings. Understanding the linkages

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~~between our natural and cultural landscapes is an important dimension of sound growth management.~~

2.5.2 Hydrology

~~Water is Yakima County's most precious resource. Water is available from various rivers, springs, lakes and underground sources. The majority of Yakima County is drained by the Yakima River and its tributaries, the far northeastern and southwestern sections of the County drain into the Columbia River. When viewed as a watershed, the Yakima River Basin is the largest drainage contained wholly within Washington State, about half of which lies within Yakima County. Mean annual precipitation ranges from over 100 inches in parts of the Cascades to less than 8 inches in the eastern lowlands.~~

Commented [KW42]: Up to date? Climate change, drought, ECV?

2.5.2.1 Surface Water

~~The headwaters of the Yakima River begin in the Cascade Mountains above Keechelus Lake in northern Kittitas County. After flowing through the Cle Elum and Kittitas Valleys, the river enters Yakima County along the high basalt columns of Yakima Canyon and emerges onto a broad alluvial plain just north of the city of Selah. Through the upper Yakima Valley, the Yakima River flows in a north-south direction past the cities of Selah, Yakima and Union Gap. As the river cuts its way through Umptanum, Yakima and Ahtanum Ridges, its flow is augmented by numerous streams in (downstream order) the Wenas Valley and Selah area, the Naches Valley, the Moxee area, and the Ahtanum Valley. Below Union Gap, the Yakima River flows onto a broad riparian plain sometimes several miles wide.~~

~~In the lower Yakima Valley, the Yakima River collects water from even more streams and drains, the most notable being Satus, Toppenish and Simcoe Creeks. Scattered across the floodplain is evidence of a highly active Yakima River, one that wandered frequently and sometimes far from its present course. Dozens of old channel scars and partially filled oxbows remind us that the Yakima River is perhaps our most dynamic natural feature. As it leaves the County south of Grandview, the Yakima River continues running in a southeasterly direction through Benton County before emptying into the Columbia River near Richland. Throughout its 200-mile course, the Yakima is supplemented with irrigation and storm water runoff which is of a far lesser quality than when it was withdrawn. The combined actions of over withdrawal, pollution and vegetation removal produce a waterway that leaves Yakima County completely altered from the one that begins near Snoqualmie Pass.~~

~~Yakima County and the larger Yakima River Basin is the site of the federally developed Yakima Project. The purpose of the Yakima Project is to store and deliver irrigation water, with hydroelectric power generation as an associated function. The six project reservoirs (see Table 2.5.2.1-1) also provide incidental flood control, recreation benefits, and some flows for fish. Three of the project's six reservoirs, Rimrock Lake, Clear Lake and Bumping Lakes, lie within Yakima County in the upper Naches River basin. The other three reservoirs (Cle Elum, Kachess & Keechelus) are located in the upper Yakima basin near its headwaters in Kittitas County. The three upper reservoirs supply water to lands in the basin above the Yakima-Naches River confluence.~~

They are also the main water suppliers of the large irrigation districts in the lower Yakima Valley. The upper Naches reservoirs provide irrigation water to lands in the lower Naches Valley. They also make a small irrigation contribution to lands in the lower Yakima Valley. Total storage capacity of all reservoirs is approximately 1.07 million acre feet, total diversions average over 2.5 million acre feet.

Table 2.5.2.1-1 Major Reservoirs in the Yakima Subbasin

Reservoir	River system	Storage Capacity (acre-feet)
Keechelus Lake	Upper Yakima	157,800
Kachess Lake	Upper Yakima	239,000
Cle Elum Lake	Upper Yakima	436,900
Rimrock Lake	Naches	198,000
Bumping Lake	Naches	33,700
Clear Lake	Naches	5,300

Yakima County and the larger Yakima River Basin are also the site of the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project (YRBWEP). The Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan (Integrated Plan) is a component of YRBWEP. The purpose of the Integrated Plan is to address a variety of water resource and ecosystem problems affecting fish passage, fish habitat, and water supplies for agriculture, municipalities, and domestic uses. The plan includes the elements of: reservoir fish passage, structural and operational changes to existing facilities, surface water storage, groundwater storage, habitat/watershed protection and enhancement, enhanced water conservation, and market reallocation.

The Integrated Water Resource Management Plan Alternative (Integrated Plan) was selected as the preferred alternative and represents a comprehensive approach to water management in the Yakima River basin. It is intended to meet the need to restore ecological functions in the Yakima River system and to provide more reliable and sustainable water resources for the health of the riverine environment and for agriculture and municipal and domestic needs.

The Integrated Plan is also intended to provide the flexibility and adaptability to address potential climate changes and other factors that may affect the basin's water resources in the future. The Integrated Plan includes three components of water management in the Yakima basin: Habitat, Systems Modification, and Water Supply. The intent of the Integrated Plan is to implement a comprehensive program that will incorporate all three components using seven elements to improve water resources in the basin:

- ~~Reservoir Fish Passage Element (Habitat Component);~~
 - ~~Provide fish passage at the five major Yakima River basin dams — Cle Elum, Bumping Lake, Tieton, Keechelus, and Kachess — as well as Clear Lake Dam.~~
- ~~Structural and Operational Changes Element (Systems Modification Component);~~
 - ~~Cle Elum Pool Raise,~~
 - ~~Kittitas Reclamation District Canal Modifications,~~
 - ~~Keechelus to Kachess Pipeline,~~

Commented [KW43]: Update to reflect either new Cle Elum reservoir height and note planned YBIP changes for Bumping, Rimrock etc. (the seven, and timelines, b/c these are all by 2046 I think.)

Commented [KW44]: Yakima Basin Integrated Plan INSERT

Commented [KW45]: Drought, three years 2022-25

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- ~~○ Subordinate Power at Roza Dam and Chandler Powerplants, and~~
- ~~○ Wapatox Canal Improvements.~~
- ~~● Surface Water Storage Element (Water Supply Component);~~
 - ~~○ Wymer Dam and Pump Station,~~
 - ~~○ Kachess Reservoir Inactive Storage,~~
 - ~~○ Bumping Lake Reservoir Enlargement, and~~
 - ~~○ Study of Columbia River Pump Exchange with Yakima Storage.~~
- ~~● Groundwater Storage Element (Water Supply Component);~~
 - ~~○ Shallow Aquifer Recharge, and~~
 - ~~○ Aquifer Storage and Recovery.~~
- ~~● Habitat/Watershed Protection and Enhancement Element (Habitat Component);~~
 - ~~○ Targeted Watershed Protections and Enhancements, and~~
 - ~~○ Mainstem Floodplain and Tributary Enhancement Program.~~
- ~~● Enhanced Water Conservation Element (Water Supply Component);~~
 - ~~○ Agricultural Conservation, and~~
 - ~~○ Municipal and Domestic Conservation Program.~~
- ~~● Market Reallocation Element (Water Supply Component).~~

~~Reclamation and Ecology worked with the YRBWEP Workgroup to develop a package of projects to meet the goals of the Integrated Plan. These projects are described individually; however, Reclamation, Ecology and the YRBWEP Workgroup intend that the Integrated Plan would be implemented in a comprehensive manner, incorporating all elements of the proposed plan. Implementing the different elements of the Integrated Plan as a total package is intended to result in greater benefits than implementing any of the seven elements independently.~~

~~2.5.2.2 Groundwater~~

~~Groundwater in Yakima County is found in the basalt that underlies most of the area, in the alluvium deposits located along the various watercourses, and in the Ellensburg formation which both overlies and interbeds within the basalt flows. The following sections describe the three principal aquifers of Yakima County in more detail.~~

~~2.5.2.3 Yakima Basalt~~

~~Yakima Basalt, a subgroup of the Columbia Basalt, include confined aquifers in interbeds sandwiched between layers of basalt. Within the region, the basalt aquifers vary in their water-yielding character from 100 gal./min. to 2,000 gal./min. Although some deep municipal and irrigation wells penetrate the Yakima Basalt, the source appears relatively untapped and is potentially the most productive and least impacted of Yakima County's three principal aquifers.~~

~~Some portions of the interbed aquifers may involve fossil waters which have no source of recharge. Potential recharge areas include contacts between the Columbia basalt flows and the units within the Cascade Range, surface and subsurface drainage along exposed interbeds~~

associated with anticlinal ridges, at gaps where streams have cut through uplifted basalt exposing interbeds, and along fault zones which bisect basalt layers. The Yakima Basalt may also be recharged in upper valley reaches by overlaying gravels and unconsolidated alluviums.

2.5.2.4 Ellensburg Formation

The Ellensburg Formation consists largely of layers of gravels, sand, silt, and clay sediments transported from the westerly portion of Yakima County on to, and in some areas inter-bedded with, the upper basalt flows. The capacity of the formation as an aquifer ranges from poor to good, depending on its depth and composition. Underlying basalt layers generally dip toward the center of valleys and easterly such that more productive Ellensburg aquifers are located in the center of lower valley reaches having deeper profiles of the formation. Principal aquifers in the formation are generally confined, weakly cemented, permeable layers of gravel and well-sorted sands interbedded with less permeable layers of clay and shale. A basal layer of this formation which lies directly above the uppermost basalt flow may be one of its more productive water-bearing zones.

Recharge is by infiltration from precipitation and irrigation, by effluent seepage from surface waters, and by upward leakage from the Yakima Basalt. The most important current source of recharge is considered to be upward leakage from the underlying basalt. Susceptible recharge areas are those where the formation is exposed at the surface or where saturated alluvial gravels directly overlie the formation. Where the formation contains significant aquifers, the largest natural discharge is potentially the upward seepage to overlying gravel units and alluviums.

2.5.2.5 Upper Aquifer

The Upper Aquifer generally consists of gravel units and principally stream-deposited, unconsolidated alluviums distributed in variable thicknesses along the valley floors. The largely cemented gravel units are considered a viable aquifer only where they contain deeper profiles of weakly cemented sand and gravel. The most productive aquifer (second only to the Yakima Basalt) is the unconsolidated alluvium. The alluvium aquifer is generally unconfined, with its thickest, most productive units occurring in syncline centers. The Upper Aquifer is generally associated with a shallow ground water table which supports the bulk of Yakima County's domestic water supplies.

2.5.3 Climate Resiliency, Achieving Sustainability

The Climate Resiliency and Sustainability Element is included here for use in Critical Area Ordinances and is based on Best Available Science and is pursuant to Second Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1180 (2023), which amended the Growth Management Act (GMA) under RCW 36.70A.070(8) to require mandatory climate change planning. This element establishes a comprehensive framework for identifying, preparing for, and adapting to the significant climate-related risks facing Yakima County, with the overarching goal of ensuring the resilience and sustainability of critical areas, shorelines, property, life, health, and the economy through

[preparation for, survival of, and recovery from extreme weather events and cumulative natural hazards.](#)

[Legal Framework and Integration Requirements](#)

[Growth Management Act Requirements.](#) ESHB 1180 mandates integration of climate considerations across all aspects of comprehensive planning. This Climate Resiliency Element must coordinate with and inform:

[Critical Areas Ordinances \(CAO\):](#) Under RCW 36.70A.172, best available science must inform critical area protections. Climate projections must be incorporated into designation and protection of frequently flooded areas (including climate-informed flood projections beyond FEMA maps, 500-year floodplains, and post-wildfire flood risks), fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas (addressing temperature-sensitive species and climate-driven habitat shifts), geologically hazardous areas (including climate-exacerbated landslide risks from changing precipitation), wetlands (considering hydrologic changes and drought impacts), and critical aquifer recharge areas (addressing changing recharge patterns and water supply vulnerability).

[Shoreline Master Program \(SMP\):](#) Under RCW 90.58 and the Shoreline Management Act, climate projections are required for shoreline planning. While Yakima County's shoreline jurisdiction is limited, planning must address climate impacts on river dynamics, channel migration, riparian vegetation, floodplain connectivity, and in-stream flows necessary for salmonid habitat.

[Overarching Goal:](#) Ensure the resilience and sustainability of critical areas, shorelines, property, life, health, and the economy through preparation for, survival of, and recovery from extreme weather events and cumulative natural hazards.

[The provisions of this element recognize that climate adaptation is an ongoing process requiring flexibility, innovation, partnership, and long-term commitment. While uncertainty exists regarding the precise magnitude and timing of climate impacts, the direction of change is clear and the costs of inaction far exceed the investments required for adaptation. Through science-based planning, community engagement, equitable resource allocation, and coordination with federal, state, tribal, and local partners, Yakima County will enhance the resilience of its communities, economy, infrastructure, and natural systems to ensure prosperity and quality of life for current and future generations.](#)

[Chapter 3, Natural Hazards provides the implementation and policy and goal detail for Yakima County's Resilience and Sustainability Strategy.](#)

~~Yakima County's climate is an important yet often overlooked aspect of our natural setting. The long sunny days and cool nights have helped Yakima County become one of the top agricultural producing counties in the United States. Our attractive climate has also boosted the County's~~

tourism industry. With over 300 days of sunshine per year and a central location within the state, Yakima County is an increasingly popular site for conventions, softball and tourism.

Climatic variation within Yakima County is extreme. The Rocky Mountains partly shield the region from strong arctic winds, so winters, while cold, are generally not too severe. In summer, Pacific Ocean winds are partially blocked by the Cascade Range. Thus the days are hot, but the nights are fairly cool. In winter the average temperatures at Yakima, Rimrock and Sunnyside are 32, 29, and 35 degrees Fahrenheit, respectively. In summer the average temperature is 68 degrees at Yakima, 61 degrees at Rimrock, and 70 degrees at Sunnyside. [USDA Soil Survey For Yakima County 1985, pg. 3] Temperatures elsewhere within the County can vary greatly from those measurements given. Scientific research supports the presence of the current climatic pattern over the last 2,500 years (Ubelacker 1986; Calder; 1974; Chatters 1981).

Yakima County's climate is an important yet often overlooked aspect of our natural setting. The long sunny days and cool nights have helped Yakima County become one of the top producing agricultural counties in the United States. The average length of our growing season is 195 days. Annual precipitation ranges from over 100 inches in parts of the Cascades to less than 8 inches in the eastern lower elevations. We depend upon significant snowpack accumulations at the higher elevations to supply irrigation water for much of the agricultural uses found in the lowland areas.

Our attractive climate has also boosted Yakima County's tourism industry. Tourism is a big business in Yakima County and it's growing. One reason people visit Yakima County is for our four full seasons of outdoor recreational opportunities. Our climate and central location within the state makes Yakima County an increasingly popular site for large conventions. And every summer hundreds of sports teams travel with their families to play in our parks and stay in our motels. It's clear that Yakima County's climate is a major contributor to the health of our local economy.

~~2.5.3.1~~

The Growth Management Act mandates that Yakima County's Horizon 2026 Comprehensive Plan integrate resiliency and sustainability principles to address 21st-century challenges while preserving the region's agricultural heritage and natural resources. This requirement recognizes that traditional planning approaches must evolve to accommodate rapid environmental and demographic changes.

Cascading Natural Hazards: An Existential Challenge

Human activities and climate change require that Yakima County fundamentally rethink how it manages growth, protects critical resources, and builds adaptive capacity for an uncertain future. The county faces an interconnected web of natural hazards that threaten every aspect of community life, economic stability, and environmental health.

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Wildfire: The Accelerating Threat. Wildfires now pose an existential risk to Yakima County's communities and economy. The 2020 Pearl Hill Fire consumed over 223,000 acres, destroying homes in Malaga and forcing evacuations across the Wenatchee Valley border. The 2021 Schneider Springs Fire burned 108,000 acres of prime timber and grazing land, while the Evans Canyon Fire threatened Yakima's western suburbs and shut down Interstate 82 for days, disrupting the region's transportation lifeline.

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These fires demonstrate wildfire's all-encompassing impact: residential areas face direct destruction and chronic smoke exposure affecting public health; critical infrastructure including power transmission lines, cell towers, and transportation corridors suffer repeated damage and costly rebuilding; agricultural operations lose crops, livestock, irrigation infrastructure, and processing facilities, with smoke taint devastating wine grape harvests worth millions annually. The economic cascade extends beyond immediate fire damage. Tourism to recreational areas diminishes due to air quality concerns and facility closures. Insurance costs skyrocket, making development and business operations financially challenging. Forest industries face supply chain disruptions as timber harvests are delayed or rendered impossible. Most critically, wildfire threatens the county's water supply infrastructure, with post-fire erosion and debris flows compromising watershed quality and reservoir capacity for years following major burns.

Drought: Historic Levels and Repeated Emergency Declarations. Drought conditions, intensified by climate change and competing water demands, create a slow-moving economic and environmental catastrophe. The 2015 drought declared the Yakima Basin in emergency status, forcing farmers to fallow 164,000 acres of productive farmland—equivalent to 14% of irrigated acreage. Junior water rights holders received zero allocation, while senior rights holders faced 47% curtailment, triggering \$54 million in federal drought assistance.

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Residential communities experience water shortages requiring usage restrictions, well failures forcing expensive drilling deeper wells, and deteriorating water quality as aquifer levels drop.

Municipal infrastructure strains under increased demand while facing reduced supply, forcing costly emergency water purchases and system upgrades.

Agricultural impacts extend far beyond immediate crop losses. Permanent crops like fruit trees and vineyards, representing decades of investment, die during extended drought, requiring complete replanting and years of recovery. Processing facilities face supply shortages, leading to reduced operations and job losses. Ranchers sell livestock at distressed prices when grazing lands fail, disrupting multi-generational ranch operations.

The **economic multiplier effect** is devastating: for every dollar of agricultural loss, rural communities lose \$2-3 in related economic activity. Food processing plants, equipment dealers, trucking companies, and agricultural service businesses face reduced demand. Rural banks experience increased loan defaults as agricultural borrowers struggle with reduced income and increased costs.

Flooding: Our Rivers, Streams, Aquifers and Floodplains. Yakima County's flood vulnerability became tragically evident during the November 1996 floods, when record rainfall and rapid snowmelt caused \$270 million in damages, destroyed hundreds of homes, and resulted in nine fatalities. The Yakima River at Umtanum reached 164,700 cubic feet per second—nearly three times flood stage—while the Naches River crested at double its previous record.

Residential areas face not only immediate displacement and property destruction but long-term health risks from contaminated floodwaters and mold growth. Lower Valley communities, including portions of Sunnyside, Grandview, and Mabton, remain chronically vulnerable, with flood insurance claims averaging \$2.5 million annually even in non-disaster years.

Critical infrastructure suffers cascading failures during major floods. Transportation networks become impassable, severing connections between communities and markets. The closure of State Route 410, Interstate 82, and numerous county roads during flood events isolates rural communities and disrupts agricultural supply chains worth hundreds of millions annually. Wastewater treatment facilities overwhelmed by floodwaters discharge untreated sewage, contaminating drinking water supplies and requiring expensive emergency responses.

Agricultural infrastructure faces complete destruction during major flood events. Irrigation systems, farm buildings, equipment, and stored crops suffer losses exceeding \$100 million during severe floods. Topsoil erosion removes the foundation of agricultural productivity, while debris deposition renders fields unusable for multiple growing seasons. Livestock losses compound economic impacts, with dairy operations particularly vulnerable to extended power outages and facility damage.

Interconnected Vulnerabilities. These hazards create compounding effects that threaten the county's fundamental viability. Post-fire landscapes become more flood-prone, as burned watersheds generate debris flows and increased runoff. Drought conditions increase wildfire risk while making communities more vulnerable to water infrastructure failures. Flooding damages water treatment facilities just as drought increases demand for clean water supplies.

Aquifer Protection: The Foundation of Ecosystem and Water Resource Integrity

Aquifer protection and groundwater recharge represent far more than safeguarding drinking water supplies—they constitute the fundamental life-support system for Yakima County's interconnected terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Groundwater serves as the critical hydrological bridge between surface water bodies and deep subsurface systems, maintaining the delicate hyporheic zones where streams and aquifers exchange water, nutrients, and dissolved organic matter essential for aquatic ecosystem health. These hyporheic environments support specialized biological communities that process nutrients, regulate water temperature, and provide spawning and rearing habitat for salmon and steelhead during crucial life stages.

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Throughout the county's riparian corridors, phreatophytic vegetation—including native cottonwoods, willows, and shrub communities—depends on shallow groundwater access to survive the region's arid summers, creating the green ribbons of habitat that support wildlife movement corridors and provide critical ecosystem services including carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, and stream shading. The intricate connectivity between groundwater and surface water systems means that aquifer depletion or contamination cascades through entire watersheds, reducing baseflows that sustain fish populations during low-flow periods, compromising the water temperature regulation that prevents thermal stress in aquatic species, and eliminating the subsurface water sources that maintain wetland hydroperiods essential for migratory waterfowl and amphibian reproduction. Protecting aquifer recharge areas through strategic land use planning, maintaining natural infiltration processes, and preventing groundwater contamination thus represents a cornerstone strategy for preserving the biological diversity and ecological resilience that underpin Yakima County's environmental and economic sustainability.

Infrastructure systems designed for historical conditions fail under contemporary stresses. The county's electrical grid, built for moderate weather, suffers cascading failures during extreme events. Telecommunication networks experience repeated damage, hampering emergency response and economic continuity. Transportation infrastructure faces simultaneous pressure from flood damage, fire closures, and increased maintenance needs due to extreme weather.

Economic resilience erodes as businesses face repeated disruption. Agricultural operations struggle with crop insurance gaps that fail to cover specialty crops and emerging climate risks. Tourism, increasingly important for economic diversification, suffers from air quality impacts and facility closures. The county's competitive advantage in food processing becomes vulnerable as reliable water supplies and transportation access face chronic threats.

The Imperative for Integrated Planning: Climate projections for the Yakima Basin indicate temperature increases of 3-5°F by 2050, earlier snowmelt reducing summer water availability, and more frequent drought conditions coinciding with extended fire seasons. These changes will stress existing infrastructure, alter flood patterns, and challenge traditional water management practices that have sustained the region's prosperity.

The Horizon 2046 Comprehensive Plan must therefore weave resiliency and sustainability into every element—from transportation networks designed to withstand extreme weather, to land use patterns that preserve carbon sequestration capacity and reduce fire risk, to economic development strategies that build diversified, climate-adaptive local economies. This integration requires moving beyond compliance to embrace innovation, ensuring that Yakima County's unique assets—its agricultural productivity, natural beauty, cultural heritage, and strategic location—remain viable despite escalating environmental challenges.

By embedding resiliency and sustainability principles into its comprehensive planning framework, Yakima County positions itself not merely to meet Growth Management Act requirements, but

Horizon ~~2040~~2046

Chapter 2 - Natural Settings Element

to lead Washington State in demonstrating how rural and agricultural communities can thrive while adapting to environmental change and managing responsible growth. This approach recognizes that true sustainability requires balancing economic vitality, environmental stewardship, and social equity—creating a foundation for prosperity that can endure the intensifying challenges and evolving opportunities of the decades ahead.

The county's survival and prosperity depend on this transformation. Without comprehensive adaptation, the recurring cycle of drought, wildfire, and flood will eventually overwhelm the community's capacity to recover, threatening not just individual livelihoods but the entire regional economy that depends on Yakima County's agricultural production and strategic location in the Pacific Northwest.

Often this analysis can be done in terms of outright dollars and cents. Yet our actions should also be evaluated for their effects on the quality of life we enjoy today and want to see for our children. Sustainability means leaving something for the next time, the next generation. This practice applies equally to the streams we divert water from. We need to look closer at the long term costs and benefits of our activities. This includes the operation of large scale extractive industries and our individual daily actions.

The Yakama Nation's Climate Adaptation Plan for the Territories of the Yakama Nation was published in April, 2016. The Climate Adaptation Plan represents the first collective effort by the Yakama Nation to identify (1) important resources and cultural components most likely to be impacted by climate change, (2) work the Tribe is currently undertaking that recognizes and will help to reduce climate change impacts, and (3) specific recommendations for deeper analyses of vulnerabilities and risks to their most important interests and adaptation actions that should be implemented. The Climate Adaptation Plan's goal is to be a starting point for the conversation about climate change and planning for adaptation throughout all of the territories of the Yakama Nation. It is derived from the experience of the Yakama Nation people, its tribal programs, and findings from regional experts on these important topics. This document is one way to educate ourselves about current vulnerabilities and future risks and share ideas about actions that may need to be taken to build climate resilience. It is a living document that will be revisited and adjusted over time to reflect new information, new understandings, and new priorities.

Some local governments in the state are taking action to address climate change through a combination of **mitigation and adaption techniques** in their operational and comprehensive plans. While addressing climate change or energy are not specific requirements under the Growth Management Act (GMA), many counties and cities are addressing climate change through land use and transportation planning or by adding climate change policies or even optional elements to their comprehensive plans. The **expected return on investment** of addressing climate change issues through planning at the local level is that development will occur where urban services exist or are planned for, where transportation choices can be more efficiently provided, and where the majority of jobs and housing are located.

July 2026 – GMA Update 2046

May 1997 – GMA Update June 2017

Commented [KW49]: NS: x.x. Priority Actions Preserve culturally important sites and foods from climate impacts. Recognize and incorporate cultural forms of conservation and adaptation wherever possible, with emphasis on coterminous lands i.e., adjacently managed, zoned etc.

Commented [KW50]: Update first two sentences to reflect that THIS PLAN IS....resiliency. This from: [Preparing for Drought | U.S. Geological Survey](#)

Commented [KW51]: Get ref, and see if this is feasible in YC.

Commented [KW52]: •Promoting stormwater and rainwater capture to augment water supplies and replenish aquifers.
•Continued advancements in irrigation efficiency (VSP)
•Drought prediction and planning
•Improper land use during drought has been a major driver of land degradation in drylands globally, especially in the western U.S. Increasing aridity in western U.S. drylands under future climates will exacerbate risks associated with drought and land use decision.
•addressing gaps in our understanding of how vegetation and soils will respond to future climates, land use, and the interactions between these factors. We will build this understanding using a several approaches, including:
1. Surveys of vegetation and soils fertility across lands with differing in land use history (grazing by domestic livestock);
2. Experiments in which we manipulate precipitation to simulate future droughts;
3. Using ecosystem simulation modelling; and
4. Experiments where we simulate the interaction of grazing and drought.

Commented [KW53]: This ROI is valid, but there a several more including protection from wildfire damages, health impacts, runoff from burnt areas, drought-resiliency....

~~This also conserves resource lands (designated agricultural, forest, and mineral lands of long-term commercial significance) and rural areas (lands outside of designated urban growth areas that are not formally designated resource lands). It may also result in a greater likelihood of transportation alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle, fewer vehicle miles traveled, a greater mix of land uses and densities in urban areas, and a better jobs/housing balance. In fact, it is believed that the desired outcomes of addressing climate change are also the desired outcomes of the Growth Management Act.~~

~~In addition to the GMA, Yakima County may address potential impacts of climate change through the administration of **State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)**. Under SEPA, actions by a governmental entity, such as granting a development permit, must be assessed for potential impacts to the natural and built environment. To perform this assessment, Yakima County relies on the use a SEPA checklist.~~

The SEPA checklist consists of a series of questions that ask for information about a proposal, such as a subdivision, a commercial building or a public building. Part of the checklist requests information describing the proposed actions impact on climate, but there is no guidance on whether or how to quantify, analyze and mitigate for greenhouse gas emissions at this time. To begin to provide such guidance, DOE is engaged with a SEPA working group to help clarify the SEPA rules and prepare important guidance information to:

- Clarify how, where and when to incorporate climate change considerations into the environmental review of a proposal.
- Recommend changes to the SEPA rules and/or environmental checklists, threshold determination, and/or Environmental Impact Statements (EIS).
- Provide instruction or guidance to local and state governments on how to determine possible mitigation strategies, and whether the impacts of climate change may affect the project over its lifetime.
- Encourage greater use of SEPA in a programmatic, upfront manner that results in streamlining permitting for compact development in urban growth areas or urban centers.

2.2 VSP and Agriculture

- Soil Moisture-Based Drought Monitoring for the South Central Region
- Soil moisture is a critical variable for understanding the impact of drought on ecological, hydrological, and agricultural systems. However, key research gaps currently prevent existing soil moisture measurements from being used to assess and mitigate drought impacts such as wildfire outbreaks, lost agricultural production, and degraded wildlife habitat. We are building the necessary scientific foundation for soil moisture-based drought monitoring in the South Central region and beyond. We will produce effective soil moisture-based drought indices that decision-makers can use retrospectively or in

real-time with data from existing monitoring networks to assess drought severity in the South Central region or across the US.

- [Assessing the Use of Biochar for Drought Resilience and Crop Productivity: Regional assessment of biochar soil amendments on crop productivity, drought resilience, and carbon sequestration](#)
- [Climate change impacts on water resources in the Pacific Northwest are predicted to have transformational effects on agriculture. Research is ongoing in the Northwest to understand agriculture practices that might allow farmers to prepare for these climate change impacts. One potential technique is the use of biochars \(charcoal made from decomposition of organic matter at high temperatures in the absence of oxygen\), which can be used as a soil amendment that can increase soil moisture retention, improve agricultural yields, and hold carbon in soil for long periods of time](#)
- [Nature-Based Solutions and Water Security](#)
- [Local perspectives in protected area design \(invasive species\)](#)

2.5.3 ~~2.5.3 Air Quality~~ Wildfires and drought

to measure and communicate social and environmental dimensions of wildfire resilience.





Comparison of Upper Lewis Creek previously treated with prescribed fire. The top photo was taken on July 8, 2015 prior to the Rough Fire. The bottom photo was taken on Sep. 29, 2015 after the Rough Fire came through. Notice the still standing live trees. Photo: NPS/ K.Howard(Public domain.)

Drought is one of the biggest threats facing our forests today. In the western U.S., severe drought and rising temperatures have caused increased tree mortality and complete forest diebacks. Forests are changing rapidly, and while land managers are working to develop long-term climate change adaptation plans, they require tools that can enhance forest resistance to drought now. To address this immediate need, researchers are examining whether a common forest management tool, prescribed fire, can be implemented to help forests better survive drought.

Managing Forests for Drought

Severe droughts cause widespread tree mortality and decreased growth in forests across the globe—even in areas with cooler climates. Mitigating the negative effects of climate change, in particular increased drought frequency and severity, poses a major challenge to forest managers. Yakima County is working with the USFS in identifying which forest management practices best minimize drought impacts for a range of forest types and climates in the County.

INSERT USFS PLANNING

Researchers are using eight long-term forest management experiments that are already underway across the country to identify how different forest management practices can increase the resistance and resilience of forests to drought. (FIND AND USE IN BAS)

Yakim County defines ecological drought as “an episodic deficit in water availability that drives ecosystems beyond thresholds of vulnerability, impacts our agricultural economy, ecosystem services, and triggers feedbacks in natural and/or human systems” (Crausbay, 2017).

Commented [KW54]: How about the “fire, flood, debris, project by DOE (Amanda)? Information here?

2.5.4—Air Quality

The primary source of air pollution in Yakima County is motor vehicles. Air quality is lowest during the winter, when the valley's shape and weather patterns combine to create an inversion layer of trapped air. Wood smoke, car exhaust, road dust (track out), and other emissions collect in this trapped layer and remain until weather conditions permit their dilution. With increased population, we will face an increasing challenge to maintain and improve air quality, particularly in urban areas.

Under state law, growth must be focused in urban areas. Yet more people locating into Yakima's Urban Growth Areas (UGA) will concentrate growth in a setting that traps air pollution. Gravel road dust is tracked out of rural areas into urban areas and is re-suspended. In order to maintain air quality, pollution from cars, wood smoke and industry must be addressed. The County's focus should be 1) to reduce single occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips, 2) reduce dependence on wood stoves as sole source of heat, and 3) work with local industries to help them comply with air quality standards.

One of mankind's most basic needs is the air we breathe. Polluted air contributes to a variety of health problems and consumes millions of dollars in medical costs each year. Polluted air also obscures visibility, creates unpleasant odors, and adversely affects animal and plant life. The attractiveness and livability of Yakima County is directly related to the quality of our air.

Air quality concerns in Yakima County are the greatest during the winter months. The weather patterns combine with our valley's topography shapes to create an inversion layer of trapped air. Wood smoke, car exhaust, suspended road dust, and other emissions collect in this trapped layer where they stay until the weather dilutes them. Polluted air contributes to a variety of health problems. Polluted air also obscures visibility, creates unpleasant odors, and adversely affects animal and plant life. Heavily traveled gravel roads also contribute to our air quality concerns in dry seasons. Yet the cost of solving the problem increases proportionately with the increased traffic resulting from Yakima's growth.

2.5.4 Geology

Between 16 and 10 million years ago, the central and eastern portions of Yakima County were overrun repeatedly by massive flows of molten lava. These flows originated from large fissures or rifts in what is now southeastern Washington and northeastern Oregon. Over and over again, each flow incident spread westward and eventually cooled to form basalt. The layers of basalt thin to the west and are generally absent at the crest of the Cascade Range. However, basalt exposures exist near the crest at Jumpoff Peak, Meeks Table and the Little Naches-American Fork River junction (Campbell, 1984). The local accumulation of these flows are known as the Yakima Basalt Group and are the youngest members of the greater Columbia River Basalts.

Near the end of the last great basalt flows, the Cascade Mountain Range was in the early stages of formation. Between basalt flood episodes came the deposition of volcanic materials, mostly large mud flows (lahars), from the newly-forming Cascades. These deposits, known as the Ellensburg Formation, are found both overlying and between Yakima basalt flows and ended

about 4 million years ago. Because the basalts become thinner and pinch out to the west, the interbedded deposits are difficult to distinguish from the overlying deposits.

Subsequent folding of the basalts and volcanic deposits has formed a series of five east-to-west trending anticlinal (upfolds of rock) ridges with broad synclinal valleys lying in between. Collectively named the Yakima Fold Belt, the ridges are individually named Umtanum, Yakima, and Ahtanum/Rattlesnake Ridges; Cleman Mountain and the Horse Heaven Hills. Their folding occurred at different rates, at times fairly rapid and others very slowly. As uplift of the ridges occurred, the Yakima River was able to down-cut rapidly enough to generally maintain its present course. Most are used primarily as rangeland. Between the ridges are basin valleys that are tributary to the Yakima Valley. These include the Wenas, Naches, Moxee, and Ahtanum valleys. These valleys are quite extensive and are the main areas used for irrigated crops.

The ridges and basins form the visual perspective of Yakima County and provide community definition. The quality of our human environment is dependent, in part, on the quality of these ridges and basins. For example, the quality of surface water may be seriously degraded if the ridge drainages are disturbed by development or erosion due to overgrazing. Wildlife habitat for upland game birds and big game may also be destroyed.

Water quality can also be degraded by development in the valley bottoms. As additional areas are paved, run-off collects urban-area pollutants which are transferred back to the surface and ground water environment. The ridges are also vulnerable to degradation as a visual resource from the construction of transmission lines, towers, houses, and roads.

The cost of developing along the ridges is high. Infrastructure costs more because water must be piped farther and upwards against gravity. Poor road networks make it difficult to reach developments. Slopes create difficulty in siting septic systems. An excessively drained septic system, for example, may contaminate wells located down slope. These conditions will not be solved in the near future by technology or a “quick fix” instead, they support the **Visioning** statement that “we must recognize that we can’t live everywhere.”

About one million years ago, lava began flowing from a volcano lying near the Goat Rocks region of western Yakima County. One eruption of this andesite lava flowed down the Tieton River toward the City of Yakima forming what is now Naches Heights. Another flow of this Tieton Andesite forced the Naches River northward from its original course along what it now Cowiche Creek. Today, the most striking exposures of the Tieton Andesite are found across from the Oak Creek Wildlife Recreation Area near the confluence of the Tieton and Naches Rivers.

During the last ice age, a glacial dam formed to block the Clark Fork of the Columbia River in Idaho. This blockage backed up a tremendous amount of water known as Glacial Lake Missoula. When this ice dam broke, the lake rushed westward to scour the top of the basalt flows and create the channeled scab lands of the Columbia Basin. Glacial flood events of this type were repeated as many as forty times during the last 30,000 years. The flood waters flowed out to the

1 mouth of the Columbia River and up the Yakima Valley depositing gravel and slack water
2 sediments as far north as Union Gap. These flood deposits can be seen in several places in the
3 Lower Valley including the gravel pits south of Grandview, along old Highway 12 near Buena, and
4 along the north side of Snipes Mountain.

5
6 With the notable exception of the eruption of Mount St. Helens in 1980, recent geologic history
7 has been a time of little change. While several minor landslides and tremors have occurred, uplift
8 of the ridges has almost stopped. The large scale erosive events of the past have diminished, but
9 the Yakima River and its side streams continue to down cut, transport and deposit sediments.

10
11 The geologic history of Yakima County has provided us with rich volcanic and river deposited soils
12 that have proven outstanding for agriculture. This aspect of our landscape, along with abundant
13 cattle grazing opportunities, is what originally spurred people to move here. Although our
14 economy has become more diversified, agriculture and its related industries are still Yakima
15 County's biggest business. In this regard, our success is tied directly to our geologic past. But
16 while large areas remain productive for agriculture, growth within Yakima County continues to
17 remove substantial tracts of the best agricultural land for urban and suburban development. We
18 will continue to face some difficult challenges in preserving our best agricultural ground as we
19 continue to develop home sites and diversify our economy.

20
21 Another important local enterprise tied to our geologic past is the sand and gravel mining
22 industry. While not a major local employer, these operations provide us with important
23 construction materials. The primary source for these aggregates is the Yakima River flood plain
24 although several sites have been developed along the ridges.

25 26 **2.5.5 Soils**

27 The geologic history of Yakima County has provided us with rich volcanic and river deposited soils
28 that have proven outstanding for agriculture. Although our economy has diversified over time,
29 agriculture and its related industries are the County's leading industry. In this regard, our success
30 is tied directly to our geologic past. But while large areas remain productive for agriculture,
31 growth within Yakima County continues to remove substantial tracts of the best agricultural land
32 for urban and suburban development. Yakima County encourages agricultural producers to
33 coordinate their activities with local, state, and federal agencies to limit loss of soil due to erosion.
34 Our challenge is to preserve our best agricultural ground as we continue to develop home sites
35 and diversify our economy.

36
37 Another important local enterprise tied to our geologic past is the sand and gravel mining
38 industry. While not a major local employer, these operations provide us with important
39 construction materials. The primary source for these aggregates is the Yakima River flood plain
40 although several sites have been developed along the ridges.

41 42 **2.5.6 Vegetation**

1 Natural vegetation in Yakima County reflects the wide range of climatic conditions found here.
2 The eastern portions of the County are dominated by steppe and shrub-steppe plants common
3 to the greater Columbia Basin. Eastern slopes and ridges are generally treeless and in their native
4 condition are covered with sagebrush and desert grasses. Typical community dominants include
5 shrubs such as big sagebrush, bitterbrush and stiff sagebrush. Stiff perennial grasses such as blue
6 bunch wheat grass, Idaho fescue and giant wild rye were once commonplace. Traveling west and
7 upward in elevation, the vegetation changes with climate and hydrology to allow an abundance
8 of plant life, and includes extensive tracts of ponderosa pine, mountain hemlock, Douglas fir and
9 various other conifer species. Ultimately, the harsh conditions of the highest points in the
10 Cascades allow for little vegetative growth. What does survive has adapted to the extreme con-
11 ditions found there.

12
13 Along stream corridors are [riparian](#) vegetative belts that contain various kinds of shrubs, trees
14 and grasses such as; black cottonwood, aspen and alder. These well vegetated stream-side
15 ~~riparian~~ zones provide substantial food and shelter for wildlife. Many aquatic organisms feed on
16 leaf litter and woody debris that collect in these streams. Insects and other invertebrates falling
17 from these plants provide an important source of food for many fish species. Birds and land
18 animals depend on stream-side vegetated areas for food, thermal protection, visual cover and as
19 a migratory corridor to other parts of their habitat. It is the sum of these parts, from
20 microorganism to migrating fish, that make habitat vibrant and healthy.

21
22 As development takes place, native vegetation is often indiscriminately removed and as a result,
23 wildlife habitat is lost. Birds as diverse as osprey, heron and wood ducks all need large trees
24 adjacent to streams for nesting. Early logging practices in the headwaters of the Yakima River
25 removed many of the larger trees from these reaches and thus ended the gathering of large
26 organic debris along the river's banks. The commonly accepted actions we take in developing
27 our resources disrupt the natural cycle that is essential to the continued health of riparian areas.
28 Livestock, logging and irrigated agriculture have irrevocably altered the native vegetation of
29 Yakima County. While our success at modifying our surroundings has driven our local economy,
30 another perspective sees the missed opportunities. Stream corridors stripped of their vegetation
31 no longer support the fish they once did. The "stair step" appearance along many of the ridges
32 are long-term signs of overgrazing. With the difficulty these lands have in recovering, pressure
33 mounts to convert them to other uses, most often housing.

34
35 The County's dominant native vegetative pattern is steppe and shrub-steppe. In the higher
36 western elevations, trees become more abundant. The majority of Yakima County's commercial
37 timber lies above 3,000 feet and much of this is outside of local land use jurisdiction. The health
38 of the timbered areas contributes to the prosperity of the County's agriculture. With fewer trees
39 in the mountains, water runs off faster and isn't retained for later seasonal use. Although
40 standard forest practices encourage replanting, re-vegetation is more difficult on the eastern
41 slopes of the Cascades. The practice of mono-cropping also makes the ecosystem more
42 vulnerable to disease and other problems.

The introduction of livestock and agricultural production in the mid- to late 1800's has also drastically changed the County's vegetation patterns. This in turn has reduced wildlife habitat since the native vegetation they depend upon is reduced. Native plants have been edged out by invaders and all this increases wind and water erosion.

2.5.7 Visual

Perhaps the most popular "postcard" image of Yakima County is [of a bountiful orchards, hop fields, and vineyards](#) stretching westward with Mount Adams visible in the background. A somewhat lesser known image is the nearby ridge lines and valley bottoms. And intermixed with the ridges and valleys are other places that hold people, roads, buildings and lights. For most of us, these urban images dominate our daily visual perspective. They seem more dynamic and fluid than ridges, [vineyards, hopfields](#), orchards and valleys. We see the changes in our urban setting more readily than anywhere else because that is where most of us live. But in Yakima County, many feel that what once looked rural and open has become increasingly filled up and more urban in appearance. We won't see our rural lands disappearing until it's already happened.

The ridge lines of Yakima County have become more than striking natural visual features. As Yakima County has grown, many of these high points have become highly coveted places in which to live and build homes. Areas like the Naches Heights west of Yakima, Lookout Point south of Selah and Yakima Ranches above Terrace Heights all offer outstanding views of the valley bottoms and seclusion from crowded city streets. Other ridge lines, such as Ahtanum and Rattlesnake Ridges, are serving the needs of a growing communication industry for the placement of transmitter towers. Yet we forget that these high points present problems for development due to the costs of providing services like roads, water and sewer. Past land use and subdivision practices have diminished the function of many ridge lines as important wildlife habitat. These same practices have also reduced the ridges' ability to serve the more traditional uses applied to them as range or agricultural land.

The open spaces in Yakima County come in many forms, some of it dedicated and protected while others are informal and not publicly accessible. The majority of Yakima County is owned and/or managed by federal, state or Tribal interests. While these lands lie largely outside of County jurisdiction, they provide the bulk of our open spaces. Most of Yakima County's recreational opportunities lie within them and they contribute significantly to other open space values such as wildlife habitat. To protect the informal, privately held open spaces, Yakima County has an Open Space Tax Program which reduces the tax assessment on agricultural and timber lands in open space. Other open space lands can also qualify for reduced assessments if their preservation provides some public benefit.

The provisions of Yakima County's adopted Critical Area Ordinance (CAO) also encourages open spaces by establishing vegetative [buffermanagement zones](#) along our streams, [shorelines](#), and wetlands. The vegetative [buffermanagement zone](#)ing provisions of the CAO were established to support the functional properties of wetlands and stream corridors. These include flood water

storage, streambank and shoreline stabilization, erosion prevention, and migratory corridors for wildlife.

The Land Use Element advocates a large lot rural zoning pattern to preserve the remaining openness of these areas. Past zoning and subdivision regulations have allowed lots down to one-half acre in size anywhere in the County. This permissiveness has resulted in a sprawling rural land use pattern that has consumed large areas of our informal open spaces.

2.6 ANALYSIS OF ASSETS, NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

2.6.1 Natural Resource Protection

As discussed in the preceding section, Yakima County is rich in both natural and cultural resources. This inheritance puts us in an enviable position for future growth. However, the prosperity of our near- and long-term future is in our hands and in many ways we are at a crossroads. Will we continue to meet our short-term needs at the expense of our long-term resources? Or will we meet the challenge of sustaining growth while preserving options and resources for both ourselves and upcoming generations?

For individuals, sustaining resources can be simple actions: turning off the bathroom tap while brushing your teeth. Recycling and properly disposing of hazardous materials like motor oil and antifreeze. Or finding alternative ways to get to work. Likewise, businesses can help build a sustainable community by “adding value” to locally produced renewable resources, providing internships and job training. These types of actions, if practiced by enough of us, foster a commitment to place and bring stability to both the economy and the environment.

To better meet this challenge, five components of sustainable land use management have been identified. These components are referred to throughout the Natural Setting goals and policies of ~~Horizon 2040~~2046Horizon 2046 and include:

- Strategies to foster improvement of the natural resources common to us all, particularly air and water quality;
- Protection of designated critical areas, including wetlands, stream corridors, and frequently flooded areas;
- Education efforts that will further awareness of environmental issues;
- Incentives that encourage the use of long-term, least-cost alternatives; and
- Performance measures that assess the state of certain key natural amenities today so they can be compared to their condition in the future.

2.7 GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

To help guide development of the Goals and Policies for the Natural Setting Element, several principles have been identified:

1. Landscapes, both cultural and natural, provide clues to a region's human personality. The way we live our lives and create our cultural landscape is a function of the natural setting, of our environment.

2. In turn, the long-term capacity of the environment to support significant population and economic growth is directly related to our understanding the limits of natural systems.

3. The natural setting and its resources drive our economic base and define our cultural landscape. It shapes our quality of life.

2.7.1 Visioning “Check-In”

Yakima County took part in a “Visioning check in” process in 2014 and 2015. This effort used online surveys to gain feedback from Yakima County residents on whether they feel the original Visioning Goals that influenced Yakima County’s Comprehensive Plan – ~~Plan 2015~~ are still relevant today or should be updated or discarded. A total of 254 people took the survey related to the natural environment, resulting in the list of revised Visioning Goals below.

Visioning Goals—Environment

1. Water:

- ~~A. Improve and maintain water quality and quantity.~~
- ~~B. Promote increased levels of water management for the purposes of conservation, storage, delivery, and flood control.~~
- ~~C. Provide effective management for diverse and conflicting water uses: agricultural, municipal, and industrial; recreational and fishery base flows; wildlife habitat; wetlands; and rural residential.~~
- ~~D. Manage the Yakima River Basin as a unique resource.~~
- ~~E. Restore the water quality of the Yakima River.~~
- ~~F. Identify future needs and promote increased water supplies through coordinated management and conservation efforts.~~
- ~~G. Improve and maintain ground and surface water quality.~~

2. Land:

- ~~A. Coordinate land uses to reduce uncertainty and unpredictable development which sacrifices conservation and sound land management.~~
- ~~B. Preserve and protect critical areas.~~
- ~~C. Inventory public open space lands and define those to preserve for future generations.~~

3. Air:

- ~~A. Address air quality challenges while recognizing the different existing and future growth patterns and regulations for urbanizing and rural areas.~~
- ~~B. Identify the impact on air quality caused by industrial and community growth patterns, such as the quantity, size, location, and nature of the growth.~~
- ~~C. Determine what threshold of air quality we wish to achieve and maintain for health and aesthetics.~~
- ~~D. Establish county-wide quality standards based on best management practices.~~

4. Education and Awareness:

- ~~A. Promote environmental education opportunities.~~
- ~~B. Foster awareness necessary to address environmental challenges.~~
- ~~C. Develop an educational awareness program which informs people of the value of their resources and the steps for their protection.~~

5. Other Programs:

- ~~A. Create resources or incentives that will promote actions which enhance the natural environment.~~
- ~~B. Increase the community's participation in recycling and other innovative solid waste disposal programs.~~
- ~~C. Create a comprehensive image that links together environmental, resources and quality of life elements.~~
- ~~D. Preserve wetlands, open lands, and other habitat areas.~~
- ~~E. Establish and enforce standards for light, glare, and noise to minimize incompatibilities within and between land use areas and to enhance quality of life.~~
- ~~F.A. Consider energy supply alternatives and energy conservation opportunities.~~

1 INSERT GOALS AND POLICIES HERE