



TRIBAL BUSINESS HIGHLIGHTS

INTRODUCTION TO Department of Natural Resources Leadership

Phil Rigdon, DNR Superintendent



Phil has the honor to serve the Yakama Nation as the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Superintendent since May 2005. His career started as a wildland firefighter and extended into forestry and natural resources. Since then, his

connection to our land, forest, and natural resources has been a driving force at the start of his professional career. He has been dedicated to hard work and developing his professional skills through experience and education. He has had the opportunity to work with many tribal leaders within our tribe and in Indian Country. DNR strives to manage, co-manage, protect, and enhance the ancestral, cultural and natural resources reserved and guaranteed within the Yakama Treaty of 1855.

Phil currently represents the Yakama Nation on the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative Salmon Recovery team, the Intertribal Timber Council Board Member, Yakima Basin Integrated Plan Executive Committee, the Washington State's Columbia River Policy Advisory Group, Hanford Natural Resource Trustee Council, Yale School of Environment Alumni Board, University of Washington EarthLab & the School of Environment Advisory Committee, and participate on many other natural resource groups and initiatives. He currently serves as Vice President of the Intertribal Timber Council and previously served as President. Phil has a Bachelor of Science in Forest Management from the University of Washington in 1996 and a Master of Forestry from Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in 2002.

Department of Natural Resources includes Fisheries, YKFP (Yakima Klickitat Fisheries Project), Wildlife, Tribal Forestry, Fuels, Fire Management, Water, Environmental Management and Emergency Response, Realty, Appraisal, GIS, Ag Development, Engineering, Roads, Environmental Restoration/Waste Management (Hanford), and Tribal Historic Preservation Office.

He proudly works to implement Yakama Nation Department of Natural Resources Programs, although there are areas that have significant challenges, staff are driven to high success and the achievements are significant and meaningful.

DNR Highlights

DNR and our programs monitor and engage in crucial natural resource activities, including Federal actions and legislation, Washington & Oregon State Legislative activities, climate change, Washington State Forest Practices, water rights applications, land use planning, Washington State Department of Transportation Projects, Hanford clean-up, and local government projects. Through this monitoring, DNR and our programs are working with the YN Tribal Council and the Office of Legal Counsel to protect our treaty resources through advocacy, response letters, and at times appeals.

DNR is working with leadership to challenge large energy projects that impact tribal resources, including Goldendale Pump Storage, Horse Heaven Hills Project, and other energy development projects that may harm treaty resources.

DNR, Fisheries, and OLC has worked with leadership on a Comprehensive Columbia River Salmon Restoration Strategy that is now part of the Six Sovereigns Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative. The Columbia River Basin Initiative (CBRI) are federal, state, and tribal commitments to a comprehensive package of

actions designed to achieve Salmon Recovery. This includes accountability for clear and measurable fisheries recovery goals, addressing the significant backlog of authorized and recommended, but historically underfunded, actions necessary for the safe and effective operation of critical fisheries infrastructure, assets, and programs. This includes implementing additional mitigation and restoration actions necessary for culturally important species throughout the Basin to ensure fish population health, that meets harvestable levels of salmon for our fishers. The Yakama Nation is also pursuing putting expert Tribal and State sovereigns in charge of mitigation and restoration work.

DNR continues our work with the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife on transferring the ownership of the Klickitat Hatchery to the Yakama Nation. Construction for modernizing the Klickitat Hatchery is starting fall of 2024. The groundbreaking for this project was on October 11, 2024.

DNR worked with our Yakima Basin Integrated Plan partners on acquiring the Springwood Ranch Project outside Ellensburg. Part of this land will be owned by the Yakama Nation, returning important aquatic and culturally significant lands. Yakama will also be developing a co-management plan for the use of these areas.

YN Welcomes Secretary Haaland

This summer Yakama Nation had the honor to host Department of Interior Secretary Haaland on July 25, 2024. Secretary Haaland met with our wild land firefighters who responded to the devastating fires in White Swan this summer to thank them for their service. Her second visit location occurred at the Wapato Dam to discuss work the Tribe, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Bureau of Reclamation are implementing, this work includes a Conservation and Modernization plan on the Wapato Irrigation Project.

Secretary Haaland, along with the Governor and Congressional staff, went to the celebration

on the completion of the Cle Elum Dam Juvenile Fish Passage Construction Project and the groundbreaking of the Adult Passage Facility that will be completed by 2026. Initial testing with water going down the helix has been successful with juvenile sockeye using helix this spring.



Cle Elum Fish Passage Celebration July 25, 2024

Yakima Delta – Bateman Island

Yakama Nation, YBIP Partners, and USACE are moving forward with the removal of the Bateman Island Causeway with construction to start in winter of 2025. The man-made causeway on the south side of the island completely blocks flows, leading to very warm water temperatures west of the island. The warm water provides ideal conditions for exotic species that prey on juvenile salmon in the spring and makes it difficult for adult salmon to swim upstream in the summer. The negative impacts of the causeway interact with slack water conditions produced by the McNary Dam to create a haven for invasive fish. Removal of the causeway is predicted to allow more regular adult passage and reduce predation in the Yakima River delta.

DNR is working to return ownership of lands from Washington DNR Tract D & Tract C areas. A Trust Land Transfer from Washington DNR was successfully approved by an advisory committee for Tract C Lands and DNR is currently working to have funding allocated for the transfer. Engagement and discussions are in progress with the State of Washington Department of Natural Resources, US Forest

Service, and Department of Interior to assess how Yakama Nation can acquire the state forest lands within the Tract D and the Klickitat area.



Land Projects

Another critical project is working with both the Appraisal & Realty Programs working to address the backlogs for appraisals that are impacting realty services needed for our community. DNR is working with the BIA and leadership on how to address these issues as we move forward. Currently several processes are occurring to deal with needed appraisals, this includes implementing a mass appraisal project by the Department of Interior AVSO office to deal with the backlog.

DNR is working with the Intertribal Timber Council on initiating an implementation strategy to get the Fourth Indian Forest Management Assessment Report out on tribal forestry. IFMAT IV is a congressionally mandated report on the status of tribal forestry every ten years.

Tribal Forestry continues to participate in off reservation collaborations to plan and implement forest activities within Ceded lands of the Yakama Nation and assists in forest related projects on the reservation. Hosted a Forestry Focused Youth Camp in August of 2024 with anticipation of a second camp in 2025. The program is leading NEPA work on the South Fork Tieton Vegetation Management Project and is a recipient of a Community Wildfire Defense Grant to complete fuels reduction work in Klickitat County.

Forest development activities consist of all silviculture treatments applied to establish, promote, enhance, and maintain forest growth and health to produce perpetual yields of desired products. Accomplishments include 623 acres planted, 993 acres thinned, and 381 acres machine piled/site prepped. In addition, Forest Development implemented projects funded by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

The Fuels program performs Hazardous Fuels Reductions (HFR) treatments within the forested and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas on the Yakama Nation reservation to reduce the risk and mitigate the wildfire threat, which includes thinning, hand piling, machine piling, tractor disk, dozer lines and prescribed Rx broadcast burning. Fuels treated 2,618 acres along Hwy 97, within the WUI, and forested area.

The Fire Management Program is a P.L. 93-638 contract program which includes the Wildland Fire Program, Fire Preparedness, Fire Prevention, Fire Suppression, and Fire Rehabilitation. Prevention attended several meetings, pow wows, parades, and staffed booths to continue to educate the community on fire safety. 96 fires were suppressed on reservation. In 2024, 59 responders participated in refresher training, 69 responders completed pack tests, 11 responders completed S-130, L-180, and S-190 training, 5 responders completed S-131 FFT1 training and 7 responders completed S-212. Fire Management will release a training schedule for pack tests, refresher, and basic fire fighter in February.



**TO STAY UPDATED WITH YAKAMA NATION GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS,
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