

## Executive Summary

This document presents the results of the work completed to date for the Skagit Basin Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plan (CIDMP), an innovative planning process involving the agricultural community in the lower Skagit River delta area of Skagit County, Washington. The agricultural community is driving this process under the leadership of the Western Washington Agricultural Association (WWAA). Input was provided by a Technical Advisory Team comprised of representatives of local, state, federal, and non-governmental organizations.

The CIDMP is a voluntary, incentive-based process that, in conjunction with actions by other local stakeholders, can lead to:

- Improvements in the availability and management of water resources for instream flows and beneficial uses.
- Solutions for avoiding or minimizing impacts to improve prospects for recovery of listed species.
- Improvements in water quality.
- Assurances for the agricultural community that their actions are in compliance with the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Rivers and Harbors Act, and Washington State water right laws.



Skagit Basin Agricultural Drainage System

The purpose of this CIDMP is to maintain the economic viability of agriculture within the Skagit Basin, while protecting the natural resources of the region. As a result of the CIDMP process, the drainage/irrigation districts and agricultural water users intend to pursue innovative compliance pathways with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency Fisheries, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Washington State Department of Ecology.

The first two phases of the CIDMP process (Steps 1 through 8) have been completed; the results of this effort are summarized in this CIDMP document. Section 1 provides background information on the purpose and intent of the CIDMP process and describes the CIDMP Planning Area and other key planning parameters. Section 2 describes the infrastructure and activities related to agriculture in the Skagit Basin, including drainage- and irrigation-related facilities, operations and maintenance practices, crop patterns and land use practices, and irrigation water use. Section 3 presents available data and information on the existing conditions of water quality and habitat for covered species in the Planning Area. Section 4 provides an analysis of the potential impacts from agricultural infrastructure and activities on water quantity, water quality, and covered species and habitat. Section 5 presents recommendations for minimizing potential impacts of agricultural infrastructure and

activities. Finally, Section 6 outlines strategies for the third phase (Steps 9 through 10) of the CIDMP process.

In the third phase, the agricultural community intends to build on the wealth of information collected thus far, and to pursue development of the actions and implementation strategies identified in this CIDMP document. The actions and strategies developed as part of this CIDMP process are designed to assist in the recovery and protection of endangered species and their habitat, protect water quality, preserve instream flows and address agricultural irrigation water needs, while helping farmers to work toward permit compliance and reduce legal risks.

As a result of the activities described in this CIDMP document, the Washington State Legislature has appropriated additional funding for the next steps in the Skagit Basin CIDMP project. This process will begin with the development of the organizational structure needed to ensure continuation of these CIDMP efforts.



Chinook Salmon

Primary tasks will be focused in three key areas:

- Development of an Agricultural Water Management Agreement pilot program.
- Development of a Habitat Restoration / Endangered Species Act compliance pathway.
- Development of a water quality permitting pathway and monitoring program.

Each task will include public involvement elements, the selection of compliance pathways, the initiation of performance-based actions, the development of appropriate legal assurance agreements with the regulatory agencies, and acquisition of any necessary permits and preparation of related environmental documents.

The State's support for the Skagit Basin CIDMP process demonstrates the importance of finding creative, locally driven solutions to address the complex issues of water resource management, habitat protection and species recovery, and water quality protection in Washington State. Preserving the agricultural character of the Skagit Basin will minimize environmental impacts, preserve open space, and promote water quality protection and salmon recovery. The Skagit Basin CIDMP is a significant step toward achieving these goals, which are shared by the agricultural community; the federal, state, and local resource agencies; Tribal and non-governmental organizations; and the community at large.