



Senator Ron Wyden
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 Suite 630
 Portland, OR 97232

Senator Jeff Merkley
 121 Salmon St.
 Suite 1400
 Portland, OR 97204

February 18, 2026

Dear Senator Wyden and Senator Merkley,

On behalf of our tens of thousands of members and supporters across Oregon, we write to object to the giveaway of public lands in the Mount Hood National Forest proposed by HR 655, a troubling measure that would sacrifice fish, wildlife, and clean water to benefit one of the wealthiest corporations on the planet. We request that you work to hold this legislation in the Senate and stop it from being included in any reconciliation legislation or otherwise passed.

Across America, there is a growing public backlash to the expansion of corporate data centers and sweetheart deals that force average citizens to subsidize their growth through higher utility rates, tax incentives, and harm to our environment. HR 655 is one such sweetheart deal, intended to allow Google and local politicians in The Dalles to sidestep important conservation laws and *triple* water storage, largely for data centers. In so doing, the legislation would harm salmon and steelhead, the rights of other water users, and chip away at America’s public lands heritage. The duplicitous effort to promote this legislation, including Dalles-area politicians’ efforts to hide Google’s role in it, is exactly the kind of deceit that has made so many Americans cynical about our government.

There are many reasons to oppose this legislation, including:

- HR 655 would eliminate 150 acres of public land in the Mount Hood National Forest, permanently transferring land that belongs to all Americans to local politicians so it can be managed to benefit one of the world’s wealthiest corporations (a corporation that already received over \$260 million in tax breaks for its facilities in The Dalles). This kind of corporate giveaway of public land is exactly why millions of Americans rallied to defeat Sen. Mike Lee’s efforts to privatize public lands in the 2025 Reconciliation bill.
- HR 655 would harm five Endangered Species Act-listed runs of salmon and steelhead in the Hood River and the Dog River, an important tributary, as well as all species migrating in the Columbia River. In 2021, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency identified the Hood River as

an “excellent” cold-water refuge for salmon migrating in the Columbia River that rely on its significantly cooler waters when temperatures in the Columbia are unsafe for salmon. Despite the EPA having identified the Hood as a “primary” cold-water refuge for migrating salmon, the lower Hood River violates Oregon water quality standards for temperature and is at risk. For this reason, the EPA identified the need to “maintain and increase flows in the Hood River Basin,” noting that at its confluence with the Columbia, Hood River flows are already overallocated from 144 to 216 percent (June through September). Removing cold water from the Dog River to benefit Google’s data centers will further reduce Hood River flows, causing increased water temperatures downstream, thus undercutting the cold-water refuge as well as the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality’s attempts to cool Hood River temperatures. If the City of The Dalles fully used the water diversion capacity that this legislation seeks to support, it could completely de-water the Dog River during the dry summer months, except for a de minimis .5 cfs bypass flow at the pipeline intake.

- HR 655 would sidestep meaningful consideration of harm to other water users and the environment. To date, neither the U.S. Forest Service or any other federal agency has meaningfully considered how Google’s exploding water demand and the expansion of The Dalles’ water use would impact those values. By transferring 150 acres of America’s public lands to the control of local politicians, the legislation seeks to ensure there will never be a meaningful evaluation of the cost and benefits of this project. Should it pass, and local politicians de-water the Dog River to benefit Google, the resulting environmental and mitigation costs would fall on a wide range of interests who would be cut out of any review process.
- HR 655 would further inflate already skyrocketing utility costs. Google’s water demand in The Dalles increased by 316 percent from 2012 to 2024, and proposed expansions of its data centers would cause that demand to explode further. Water utility rates for residential customers in the Dalles are now [estimated to increase by 99 percent](#) by 2036. A massive corporation with Google’s resources could easily afford to buy water rights from private sources to mitigate its impacts and provide for its exploding water demands rather than mine The Dalles’ formerly unused water rights and unused groundwater rights related to a now defunct smelter — the use of which depleted aquifers around The Dalles and resulted in Oregon’s first designation of a groundwater limited area in the state — rather than cynically undermine America’s public lands heritage and put fish, wildlife, and communities in the Hood River Valley at risk.
- HR 655 would reward bad faith behavior by City of the Dalles officials and Google. For years, these two entities have attempted to hide the impact of Google’s growing water use. The Dalles tried to conceal records on Google’s water use, leading *The Oregonian* to sue to force city politicians to obey Oregon public records law and disclose legally-required public information. Despite The Dalles initially denying it, it later came to light that Google paid for the city’s lawyers who sought to block public disclosure of their water use. Google has also used proxy entities in

public processes around water projects in The Dalles to avoid demonstrating its involvement and interest.

HR 655 is a terrible piece of legislation that would put the interests of a wealthy corporation and their political allies ahead of the interests of Oregonians and the fish, wildlife, wild rivers, and public lands that we hold dear. The backers of this cynical legislation seem to feel that the rules that safeguard Oregon's salmon, water, and public lands are just "red tape" to be [eliminated in the name of efficiency](#). They do not understand that these values are what makes Oregon such a special place, and that Oregonians do not want to see them degraded to benefit one of the wealthiest corporations on the planet.

Senators Wyden and Merkley, we urge you to stand with Oregonians who know that these values, and the rules that protect them, are vital to preserving the natural treasures that make our home state such a special place to live, work, and raise a family. **Please use every tool at your disposal to stop HR 655.**

Sincerely,

Association of Northwest Steelheaders
James Adkins, Executive Director

Bark
Will Fett, Executive Director

Bird Alliance of Oregon
Joe Liebezeit, Statewide Conservation Director

Columbia Riverkeeper
Kelly Campbell, Policy Director

Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Renee Tkach, Conservation Director

Native Fish Society
Dan Ritz, Northern Oregon Coordinator

Northwest Environmental Advocates
Nina Bell, Executive Director

Northwest Guides and Anglers Association
Bob Rees, Executive Director

Oregon Wild
Steve Pedery Conservation Director

Save Our wild Salmon
Joseph Bogaard, Executive Director

Sierra Club
Damon Motz-Storey, Oregon Chapter Director

Thrive Hood River
Carrie Thomas, Board Member

WaterWatch of Oregon
John DeVoe, Special Advisor

Western Environmental Law Center
Sristi Kamal, Ph.D., Deputy Director

CC: Sen. Jeff Merkley
Governor Tina Kotek
Rep. Cliff Bentz

Attachment

Karen Wise



EPA-910-R-21-001
January 2021



Columbia River Cold Water Refuges Plan

Prepared by:
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Region 10



7.12 HOOD RIVER (RIVER MILE 166) – PROTECT AND ENHANCE



Photo 7-44 Hood River

What features make the Hood River an important cold water refuge to protect and enhance?

Located at river mile 166 of the Columbia River, the Hood River is approximately halfway between the Bonneville Dam and Dalles Dam. It is located one mile upstream from the White Salmon River, the next downstream refuge. Hood River temperatures in August average 15.5°C, 6°C cooler than the Columbia River. This classifies the Hood River an excellent CWR (<16°C).

However, the large sand bar at the confluence, channelization in the lower Hood River, and relatively low depth (~0.8 meters) in the summer may present barriers to salmon using the Hood River as a refuge. Additionally, a fish monitoring station near the mouth of the Hood River detected few out-of-basin steelhead (10-15 annually) migrating upstream of the station between 2010-2015. For that reason, only the mouth of the Hood River is included as a CWR (**Photo 7-45**).



Photo 7-46 Middle Fork of the Hood River

for temperature impaired waters. The Hood River is the eleventh largest CWR in the Lower Columbia River with a cold water plume volume of 28,000 m³, or 11 Olympic-sized swimming

Refuge Volume: 28,000 m³ (12th largest)

Average August Temperature: 15.5°C

Distance to Downstream Refuge: 1 mi. (White Salmon River)

Distance to Upstream Refuge: 11 mi. (Klickitat River)

Cold Water Refuge Rating: Excellent (<16°C)

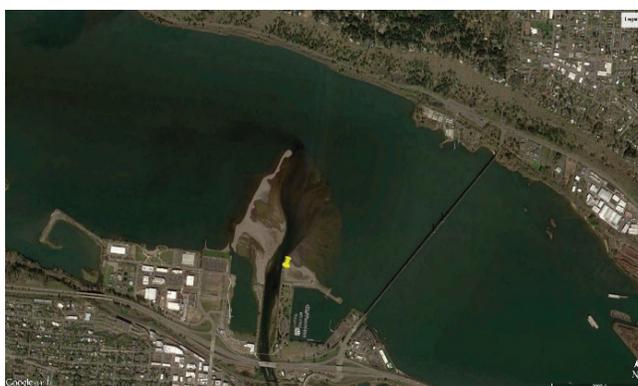


Photo 7-45 Aerial view of Hood River at the confluence with Columbia River; yellow pin denotes upstream extent

The lower portion of the Hood River is designated by ODEQ as core cold water habitat with an assigned water quality criterion of 16°C for maximum water temperatures. The maximum modeled temperature for the Hood River is 19.1°C (1993-2011) (Appendix 12.18). Based on measured maximum temperature readings, the lower Hood River is on the 303(d) list

pools, and mean flows of 374 cfs. The next available CWR is 11 miles upstream in the Klickitat River.

Introduction to the Hood River Watershed

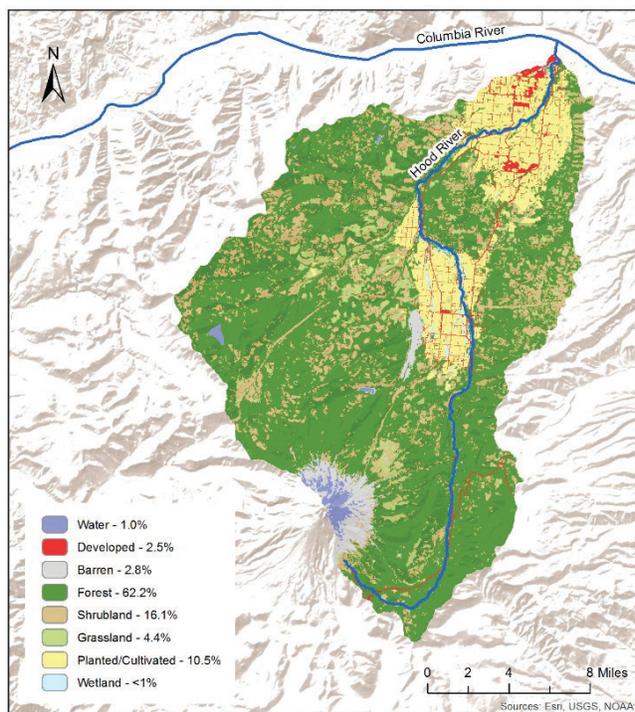


Figure 7-35 Hood River land cover

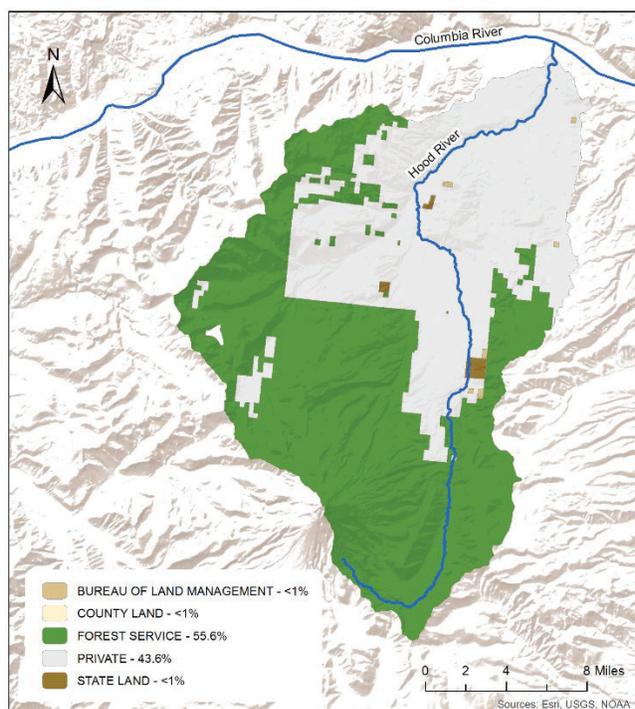


Figure 7-36 Hood River land ownership

The Hood River watershed drains the snow-laden eastern flank of Mount Hood and the land to the north of the volcano. Three major tributaries, the East, West, and Middle Forks, cascade down from the mountainous headwaters. The longest tributary, East Fork, drains Mount Hood Meadows ski and snowboard resort and flows east and then north, collecting Dog River and the Middle Fork before meeting the West Fork near the small unincorporated community of Dee, Oregon, approximately 11 miles south of the City of Hood River, the only significant urban development in the basin. Above this confluence, the East Fork is considered the mainstem Hood River.

Protected as part of the Mount Hood National Forest, much of the upper basin retains natural land cover, contributing to high levels of riparian shading. Approximately 60% of the basin is forested; shrubland (16%) is found in fragments throughout the watershed, and cultivated crops (11%) predominate on flat topography south of Hood River and surrounding Dee. USFS owns and manages 56% of the watershed, with the remaining 44% privately owned (Figure 7-36). The City of Hood River, located at the confluence of the Hood and Columbia Rivers, has the largest population in the watershed. In the past, the Hood River delta and lowlands were flooded during the construction of Bonneville Dam. Currently, the mouth of Hood River is channelized. The mouth of the Hood River is in the Hood River Urban Area of the Columbia River Gorge Scenic Area and is managed by the City of Hood River and the Port of Hood River.

Factors that Influence Temperature in the Hood River Watershed

Protecting and Enhancing Riparian Vegetation

Although much of the Hood River watershed is well-shaded to maintain cool river temperatures,

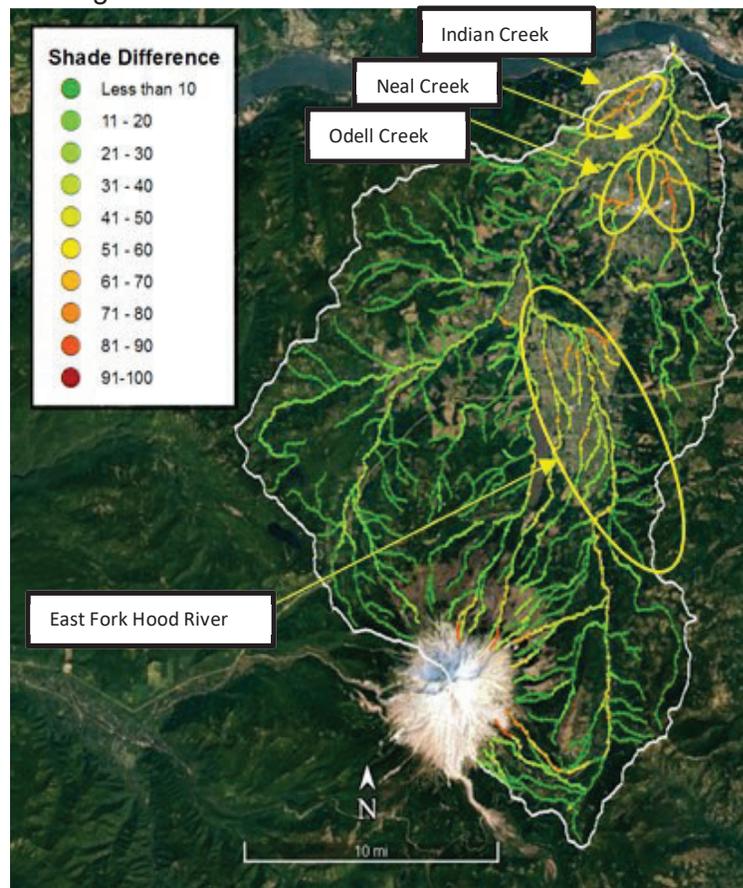


Figure 7-37 Hood River shade difference between potential maximum and current shade

there are several developed river reaches that have lost much of their riparian shade. **Figure 7-37** displays the difference between potential maximum and current shade conditions, helping to identify reaches in the Middle and Lower Hood River that could be restored to provide more riparian shade where high levels of development and agriculture occur. On average, shading from riparian conditions could be improved by 37% to cool temperatures at the confluence. Areas with the most potential for riparian shade include Indian Creek, Odell Creek, Neal Creek, and the East Fork Hood River Creek. Water quality modeling in ODEQ's *Western Hood Subbasin TMDL (2001)* predicted maximum potential vegetation and a minimum instream flow of 250 cfs from Powerdale Dam could decrease maximum water temperatures at the mouth from 18°C to 15°C.

Dams and Hydromodifications: In the past, Powerdale Dam, located on river mile 4.5 of the Hood River, withdrew a significant amount of water that affected the water quality and quantity downstream in a 3-mile bypass reach. In 2010, the Powerdale Dam was decommissioned. Although there are no permanent flow and temperature gauges since Powerdale Dam was removed, the updated 2018 *Western Hood Subbasin TMDL* projected that temperatures would decrease with increased flows in the lower 4.5 miles of the Hood River. A small hydroelectric dam on Odell Creek was removed in 2016, which has expanded the time for resident salmonid spawning. The dam on Clear Branch, a tributary to the Middle Fork Hood River, raises temperatures downstream of the reservoir during



Photo 7-47 Hood River at the site of the former Powerdale Dam

most of the summer. The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation also operates and manages a fish hatchery on the Middle Fork Hood River.

Water Use: Irrigation is the dominant water use, and there are past and ongoing efforts to improve the efficiency of irrigating crops to reduce water demand, decrease agricultural runoff, and increase flow in streams. The three primary irrigation districts are: Farmer’s Irrigation District (FID), Middle Fork Irrigation District (MFID), and East Fork Irrigation District (EFID). MFID operates the Clear Branch Dam for irrigation. EFID has the largest water withdrawals for irrigation. **Figure 7-38**, from the *2006 USFS Mount Hood National Forest Aquatic Habitat Restoration Strategy*, shows the large amount of diversions throughout the basin, especially the lower Hood River. **Photo 7-47** Hood River at the site of the former Powerdale Dam **Photo 7-47** also shows the now-decommissioned Powerdale Dam. In 2016, the

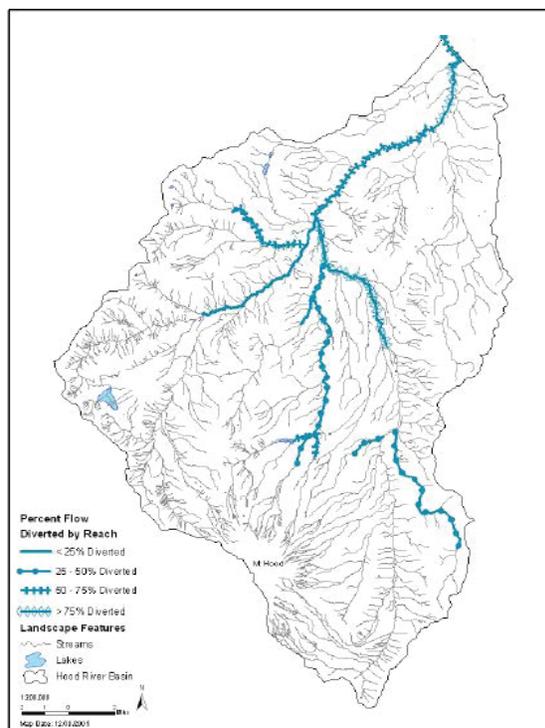


Figure 7-38 Estimated flow diversions in the Hood River Basin in 2006

Table 7-5 Water Availability Analysis, 5/20/20 Hood River at river mile 0.75, 5/23/18, Oregon Water Resources Department

HOOD R > COLUMBIA R – AT RM 0.75 (@ 80% exceedance)			
Month	Monthly Streamflow (cfs)		
	Natural Streamflow	Water Allocated or Reserved	% Allocated*
JUNE	745	1,069	144%
JULY	588	1,031	175%
AUGUST	457	989	216%
SEPTEMBER	438	918	210%
Top Users: Other (68%), Irrigation (21%)			
*% Allocated: [Water Allocated or Reserved]/[Natural Streamflow]. This is the percentage of water either allocated or reserved for in-stream or other uses compared with the natural streamflow. Percentages over 100% indicate the water is overallocated at the mouth of the river.			
Reference: https://apps.wrd.state.or.us/apps/wars/wars_display_wa_tables/display_wa_details.aspx?ws_id=30410575&exlevel=80&scenarior_id=1			

Hood River Soil and Water Conservation District published the *Hood River Water Conservation Strategy*, a report developed with the agricultural community to evaluate different alternatives to reduce water usage. **Table 7-5** shows that the Hood River is overallocated during the summer months at river mile 0.75. ODFW applied for and was granted instream water rights (ISWRs) to protect fish at several locations in the basin in different years. ISWRs function like all water rights, and are junior to any earlier water rights. ISWRs provide targets for the flows needed to support fish, wildlife, their habitats and recreation. In 1966, 1983, and 1998, ODWR approved three ISWRs on Hood River at river mile 4.5 (former Powerdale Dam) to the mouth at 45, 100, and 250 cfs, respectively, in August. There were 18 ISWRs on tributaries to the Hood River granted from 1966 to 2016,

including on the West Fork Hood River (summer range: 100-255 cfs), East Fork Hood River (summer range: 75-210 cfs), and Middle Fork Hood River (summer range: 10-233 cfs). These ISWRs serve to help maintain existing flows, although senior water holders primarily for irrigation can still diminish flows below these levels in low flow years. Therefore, improving irrigation water efficiency will increase the water quality and quantity for resident and migratory fish in the tributaries and mouth of the Hood River.

Climate Change: In 2040, August temperatures in the Hood River are projected to rise to 16°C, compared to 23°C in the Columbia River. In 2080, August temperatures in the Hood River are expected to rise to 17°C compared to 24°C in the Columbia River. Therefore, increases in Hood River temperatures are expected to keep the Hood River as a good CWR (16-18°C). Still, the Hood River is expected to be more than 7°C cooler than temperatures in the Columbia River in the summer, even under climate change projections.

Ongoing Activities in the Hood River Watershed and Recommended Actions to Protect and Enhance the Cold Water Refuge

The existing watershed plans with targeted actions and partnerships provide a solid foundation for protecting and improving conditions in the basin and at the confluence. In 2004, the Hood River Soil and Water Conservation District completed the *Hood River Subbasin Plan*, a comprehensive review of the watershed with prioritized actions identified by many stakeholders in the basin, which was adopted by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. In 2014, the Hood River Watershed Group updated the subbasin plan and published the *Hood River Watershed Action Plan (2014)*, which provides a list of new projects to be implemented over several years. In 2006, the USFS completed the *Hood River Aquatic Habitat Restoration Strategy*, which targets the lower watershed for greater riparian cover and increased flows. In 2016, the Soil and Water Conservation District released a study on water conservation and efficiency, *Hood River Water Conservation Strategy*. ODEQ updated its *Western Hood Basin TMDL* in 2018, retaining the riparian shade targets from the 2001 TMDL. Numerous other plans have been developed targeting efforts on USFS lands, more efficient water use, reduction of pesticide use and runoff, improvement of fish passage and habitat, among other plans. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs has worked extensively in the basin conducting monitoring and restoration projects. Many recommendations in these plans will benefit the downstream CWR area. Increased riparian vegetation on agricultural land will reduce pesticide runoff and shade streams, helping improve water quality.

The lower part of the Hood River basin is part of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and covered under the *Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area* (2016). This plan includes “open space” land use designation and associated limits on new development and buffer restrictions for a significant portion of the lower Hood River, which serves to help protect water quality and the Hood River CWR.

Actions to protect and enhance the Hood River CWR include:

- On national forest lands, continue to implement [aquatic strategies](#) and actions in the [USFS Mount Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan](#) (1990) and its amendments, and the [Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area](#) (2016) to protect and restore riparian shade and stream functions to maintain cool river temperatures. (USFS)

- Continue to implement Oregon's [Forest Practices Act](#) on private forest lands in the watershed to protect and restore riparian shade and stream functions to maintain cool river temperatures. (ODF)
- On private and county lands, continue to implement the riparian protections in the [Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area](#) (2016) through the [county Scenic Area ordinance](#) to regulate development in the lower Hood River watershed to protect riparian shade and stream functions to maintain cool river temperatures. (Hood River County)
- Restore riparian vegetation in the Hood River basin including Indian Creek, Neal Creek, Odell Creek, and the area of the decommissioned Powerdale Dam (**Photo 7-47**) as identified in the [Western Hood Basin TMDL \(2001, 2018\)](#), [Hood River Aquatic Habitat Restoration Strategy](#) (2006), and the [Hood River Watershed Action Plan](#) (2014).
- Continue implementing water efficiency projects to maintain and increase flows in the Hood River basin noted in the [Hood River Basin Water Conservation Strategy](#) (2016). (Multiple parties)
- Increase the amount of instream large woody debris to create pools of cold water and trap sediment that would otherwise reach the river mouth. (Multiple parties)
- Support education and outreach opportunities for habitat and riparian restoration on privately-owned properties in Hood River watershed plans. (Multiple parties)