

UMATILLA MILL CREEK AQUATIC ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION CAP 206 (165a)

Public Scoping
April 2025

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PUBLIC SCOPING

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would like solicit your input on the scope of this project and potential measures and alternatives.

- File electronic comments directly online at:
<http://www.nww.usace.army.mil/EnvironmentalComplianceComment/>
- Emailed comments to NEPANWW@usace.army.mil, inserting “Umatilla Mill Creek Section 206” in the subject line.
- Mail comments to: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla District, ATTN: PPL-C, Umatilla Mill Creek 206, 201 North 3rd Avenue, Walla Walla, WA 99362-1876.
- Comments should be received by April 28, 2025.



STUDY SPONSOR AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS

CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE UMATILLA INDIAN RESERVATION (CTUIR)

Non-Federal Sponsor – This project was proposed by the CTUIR to tie into the upstream Federal project. USACE received approval to use the 165a authority to partner and provide 100% Federal funding. The CTUIR proposal states:

“This project intends to complete fish passage improvements to an additional segment of approximately 63 grade control sills that lie between two segments that are already in planning and design by the USACE and other subbasin partners. This project will build on design concepts developed collaboratively with the USACE to notch each grade control sill to create a low flow channel for improved fish passage and water quality.”

MILL CREEK FLOOD CONTROL ZONE DISTRICT (MCFCZD/WALLA WALLA COUNTY)

The project location is within the portion of the Mill Creek Flood Control Project operated and maintained by the MCFCZD. They are the primary real estate holders outside of the levee system and they provided a letter of support to the CTUIR as part of their application package.

MILL CREEK WORK GROUP

A group of Federal, state, tribal, city, county and stakeholders that advocate for fish passage and habitat improvements in Mill Creek.

TRI-STATE STEELHEADERS

A community-based non-profit organization dedicated to promoting healthy salmon and steelhead populations in southeastern Washington, northeastern Oregon, and north central Idaho. Tri-State Steelheaders have completed several fish passage improvement projects on Mill Creek and are currently constructing one downstream of the proposed project area.



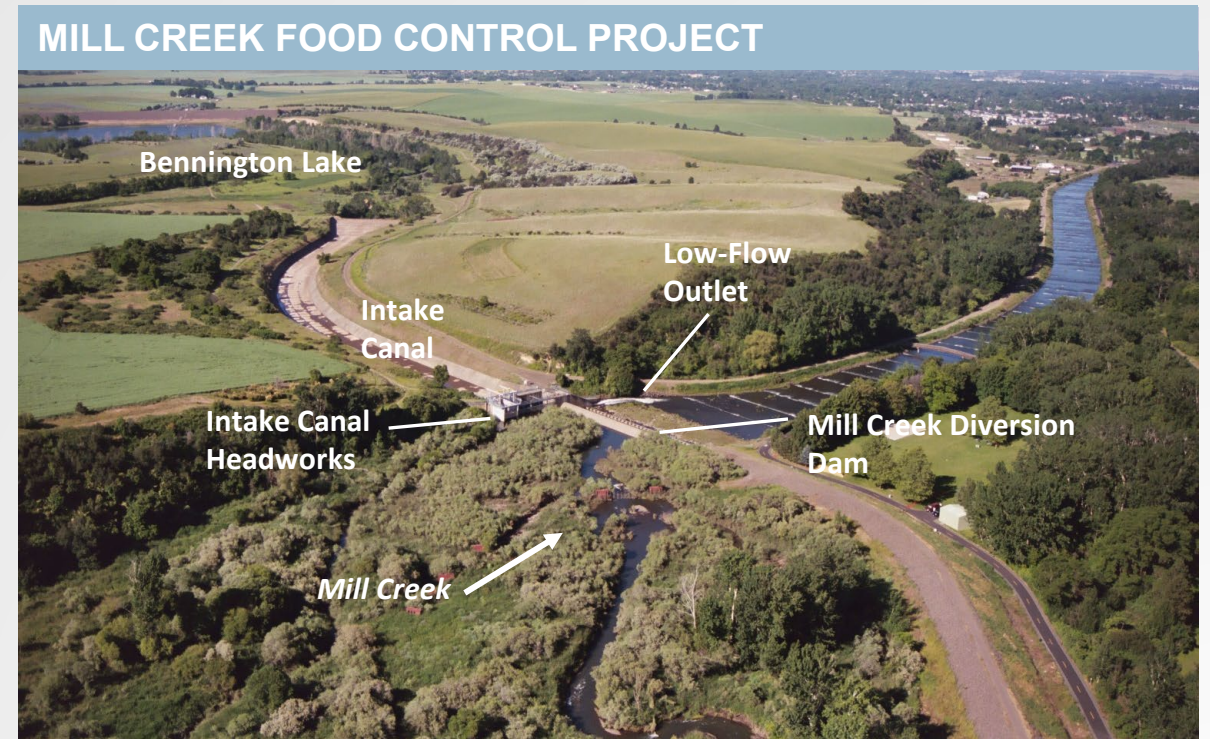
STUDY AUTHORITY

Water Resource Development Act of 2020, Section 165(a), as amended – Pilot program for Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) projects in small or disadvantaged communities.

WRDA 1996, Section 206, as amended, Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration.

WRDA 1986, Section 1135, as amended, Project Modifications for Improvement of Environment. *Note: The 1135 authority would be used in the design phase.*

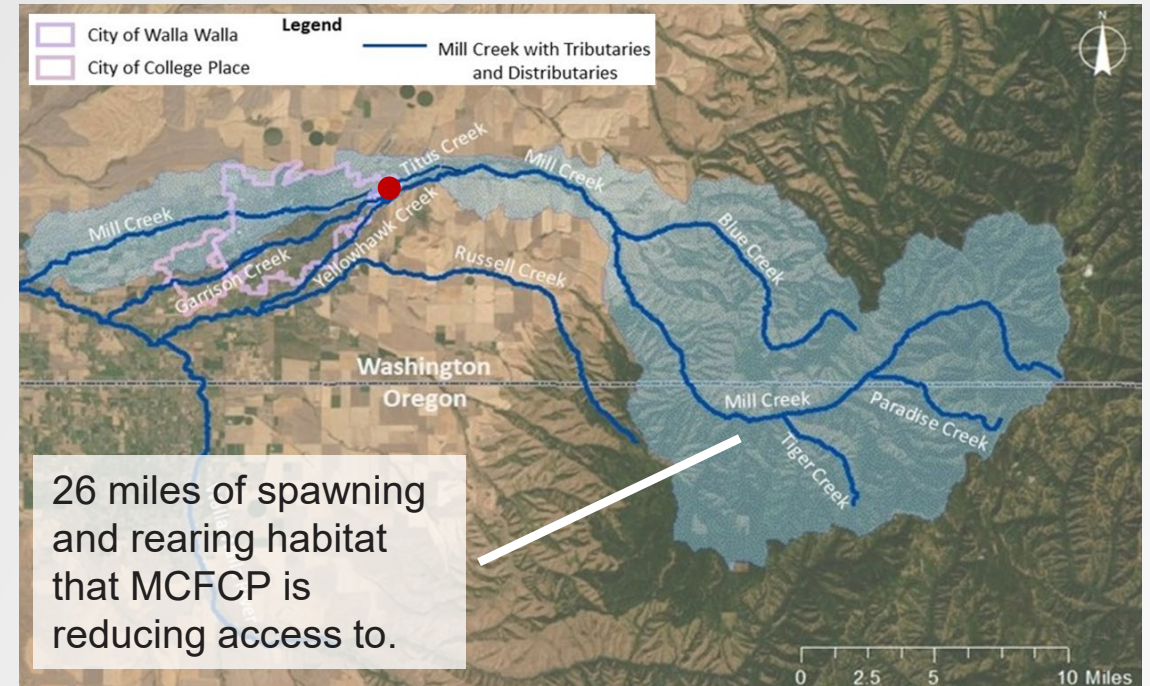
Flood Control Act of 1938 authorized the construction of the Mill Creek Flood Control Project (MCFCP). The location of the current CAP 206 project is within the MCFCP.





THE PROBLEM

- Approximately 200+ concrete stabilizers span the Mill Creek channel and put Endangered Species Act-listed fish at risk by creating passage barriers.
- Reduced flows through the project reach during summer contributes to poor fish passage and elevated and potentially lethal temperatures.



Mill Creek is designated critical habitat for ESA-listed mid-Columbia River steelhead, and bull trout and reintroduced Chinook salmon, a species extirpated from the Walla Walla River Basin in 1925. Spawning and rearing habitat is identified as a limiting factor to recovery of mid-Columbia steelhead. These species are of institutional, public, and technical significance nationally, and of cultural significance to the CTUIR.



PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed action is to improve fish passage and water quality conditions in Mill Creek from the Federal section of the Mill Creek Flood Control Project (MCFCP) to the downstream fish passage improvements planned by the Tri-State Steelheaders.

USACE will minimize short-term impacts to aquatic species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) while providing long-term fish passage for all species occurring in the area.

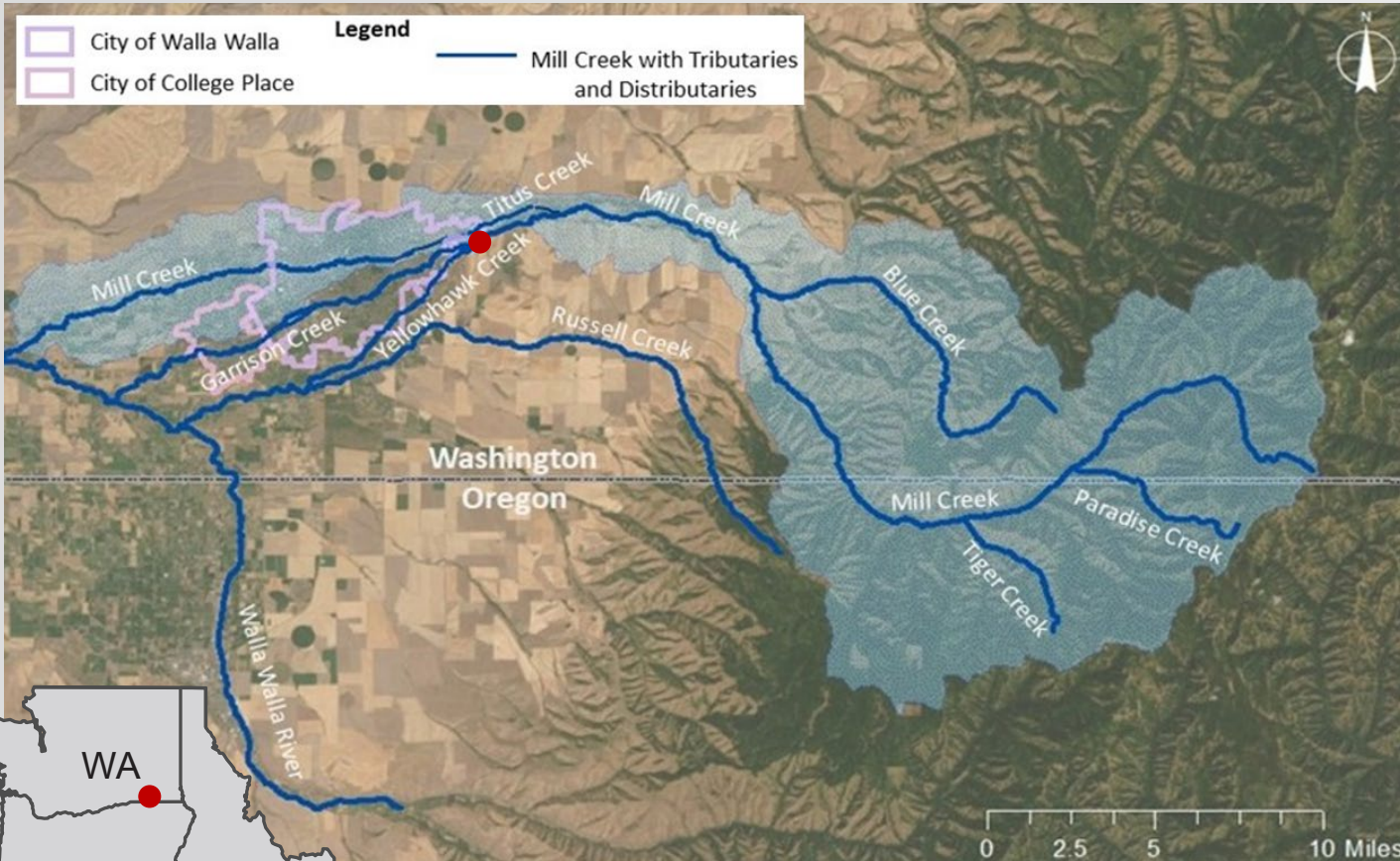
This action is needed to correct poor fish passage and water quality conditions created by the flood risk reduction project, exacerbated by reduced flows induced by municipal and irrigation water withdrawals. Removal of physical and thermal fish passage barriers will connect access to 26 miles of spawning and rearing habitat upstream of the MCFCP.

Spawning and rearing habitat is identified as a limiting factor to recovery of mid-Columbia steelhead.



STUDY AREA / PROJECT LOCATION

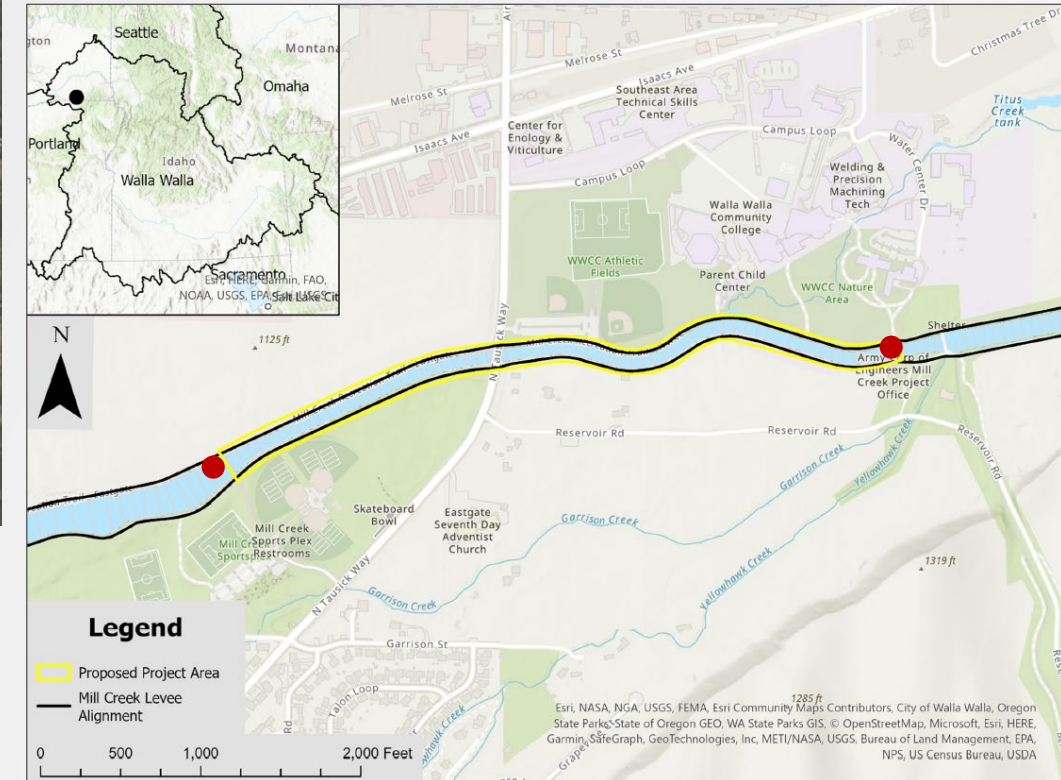
STUDY AREA – MILL CREEK WATERSHED



- Mill Creek to Confluence with Walla Walla River = 33 Miles
- Walla Walla River to Confluence with Columbia River = 33.5 Miles

PROJECT LOCATION – MILL CREEK

- Within the Mill Creek Flood Control Project, in the portion owned by the Mill Creek Flood Control Zone District (Walla Walla County)
- Begins just downstream of the west boundary of the federally owned Mill Creek Project
- Includes a potential alteration of 63 stabilizers



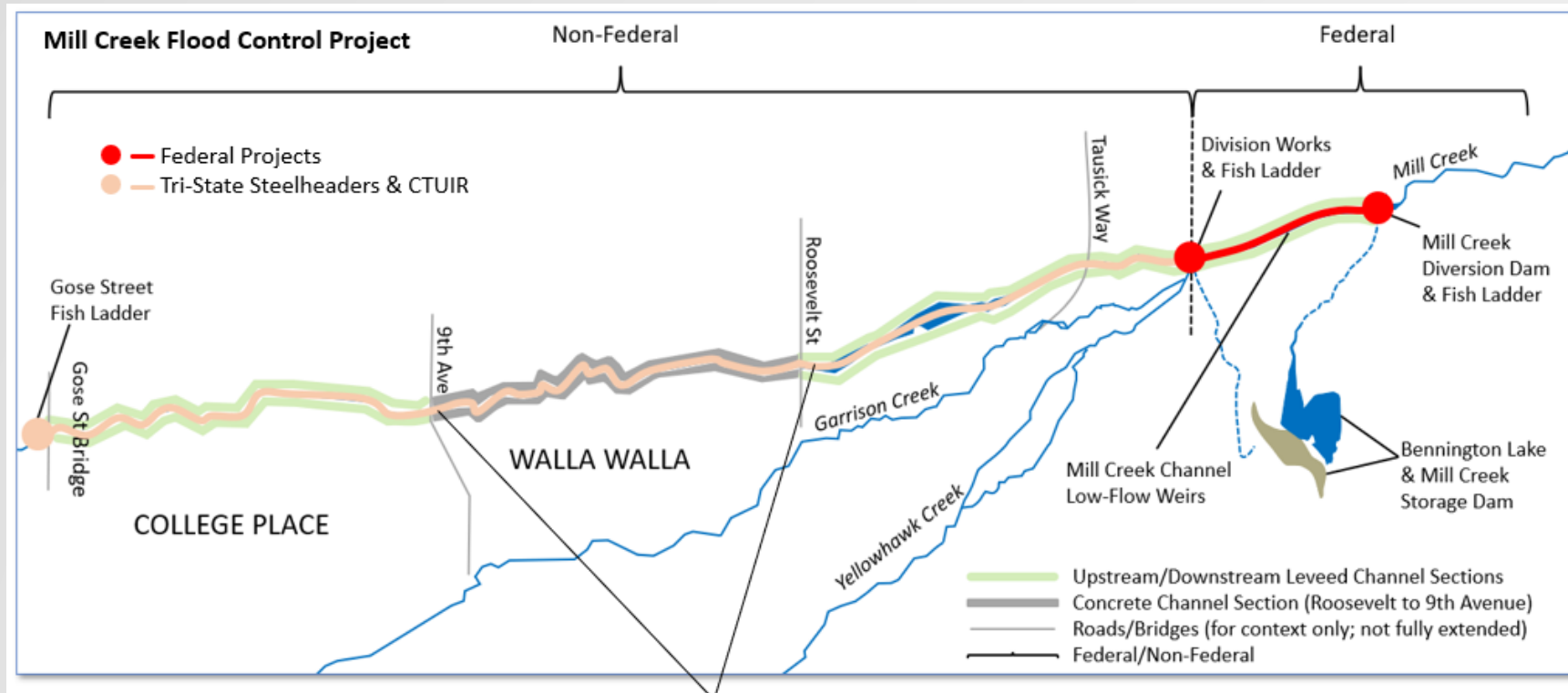


PROJECT LOCATION (REACH)





LOCAL FISH PASSAGE IMPROVEMENTS





USACE PROJECTS

USACE has undertaken several projects within the Federal footprint to improve fish passage:

- Low flow prototype stabilizers - 3 stabilizers notched, with varying designs
- 2020 Improvements for fish passage to the Division Works fish ladder
- 2026-2027 Mill Creek Diversion Dam fish ladder replacement





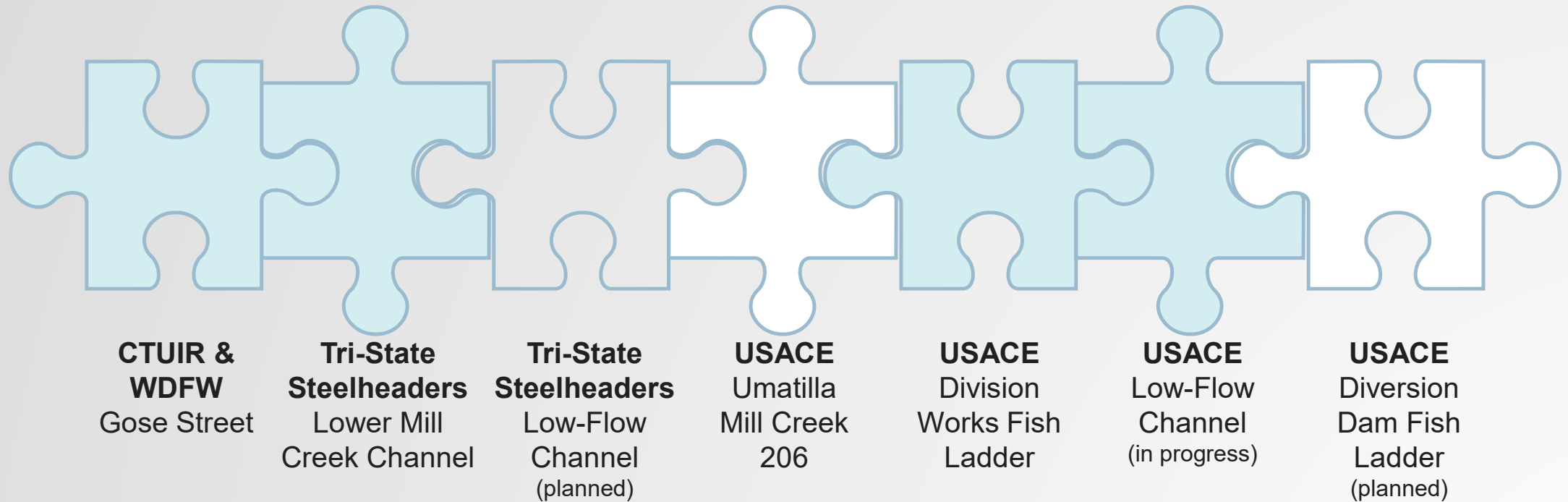
FEDERAL REACH LOW FLOW PROJECT





MISSING PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

MILL CREEK CHANNEL FISH PASSAGE IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS





OPPORTUNITIES

- Provide connectivity and access to 26 miles of high-quality rearing and spawning habitat in upper Mill Creek above the Mill Creek Diversion Dam.
- Improve fish passage in designated critical habitat for ESA-listed mid-Columbia steelhead and bull trout, and reintroduced Chinook salmon.
- Support the CTUIR First Foods program by providing habitat improvements for culturally significant touchstone species like steelhead, salmon, and lamprey.
- Support development of sustainable fish populations for a culturally important tribal fishery and public recreational fishery.
- Improve fish passage into and out of the downstream end of Titus Creek.





OBJECTIVES AND CONSTRAINTS

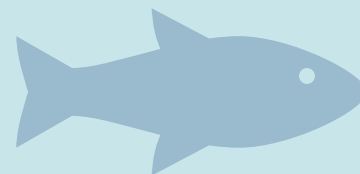
OBJECTIVES

- Remove physical and thermal fish passage barriers in the leveed project reach of Mill Creek in Walla Walla, which is designated critical habitat for two ESA-listed fish.
- Improve access to high quality spawning and rearing habitat upstream of the Mill Creek Diversion Dam for ESA-listed fish by improving in-stream conditions and reducing travel times through the leveed reach of Mill Creek.
- Re-establish habitat connectivity in Mill Creek for ESA-listed fish and for reintroduced Chinook salmon.
- Successfully transition between current project and future fish passage improvements to be constructed downstream by the Tri-State Steelheaders.
- Successfully transition between the current project and the future low-flow stabilizers within the federally owned reach upstream.

CONSTRAINTS

Measures must not:

- Impede the function of the existing federally constructed levees, now owned and operated by the MCFCZD.
- Impede existing water rights.
- Strand fish or make fish passage worse (including at Titus Creek).
- Reduce flood protection.
- Reduce levee freeboard – cannot raise the water surface or increase the likelihood of levee toe failure.
- Affect the functionality of the ford just upstream of the uppermost project boundary.
- Affect the function of the Tausick Way Bridge.



ESA-Listed Fish

- Columbia Basin Bull Trout
- Mid-Columbia River Steelhead



CONSIDERATIONS

- Maintain access for channel maintenance.
- Channel maintenance – County unable to increase maintenance or do anything outside of flood control.
- Avoid landfill on both north and south sides of Mill Creek
- Bridge at Tausick Way is a pinch point.
- Maintain the emergency crossing at eastern boundary of the project reach.
- Memorandum of Understanding for Stabilizer 1 (owned by both County and USACE).
- Stabilizer structure, consists of concrete capped gabion baskets.
- Impacts to existing recreation trail.
- Titus Creek fish passage.
- Transition with Tri-State Steelheaders project downstream.
- Yellowhawk/Mill Creek flow management.



Titus Creek Culvert



PATH TO A TENTATIVELY SELECTED PLAN



- Measures
- Final Array of Alternatives
- Topographical Survey in summer 2025
- Stabilizer Design Criteria Discussions with Resource Agencies
- Cost Estimate
- Feasibility Report/Environmental Assessment Development
- Hydrology and Hydraulics Modeling
- Habitat Modeling
- ESA Consultation



SUBMITTING COMMENTS

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