



## CASE STUDY:

### Accessing Diverse Funding Streams for Post-Fire Recovery in North Yakima County, Washington

Project Title: Yakima Tieton Irrigation Canal Repairs  
Project Leads: Yakima Tieton Irrigation District and North Yakima Conservation District

## Background

### *The area*

The stretch of U.S. Route 12 known as “White” Pass connects Yakima and Lewis Counties in Central Washington along the Cascade Range. The White Pass Scenic Byway winds through the cold-moist dense mixed coniferous stands of the Gifford Pinchot and dry mixed conifers of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests. The area is a recreational paradise in the eastern Cascades, with camping, skiing, hiking, and snowmobiling all accessible within the shadows of Mount Rainier (Tahoma) and Mount Adams (Pahto).

### *The Retreat Fire*

In mid-July of 2024, a propane tank explosion ignited the Retreat Fire, which burned approximately 45,000 acres of private and mixed public ownership (state, federal) land along the Tieton River between Rimrock Lake and the town of Tieton in Yakima County. The fire not only threatened residences and recreational facilities, but also critical irrigation infrastructure. The 115-year old Yakima Tieton Irrigation Canal, managed by the Yakima Tieton Irrigation District (YTID), snakes alongside the steep banks of the Tieton River. This canal system provides irrigation water for nearly 30,000 acres of cropland like orchards, hay fields, and pasture, in addition to residences.

## Wildfire Effects

The effects of the Retreat Fire were felt across both natural and built environments in Yakima County. The fire resulted in the loss of 5 structures as well as the closure of U.S. Route 12. Burn scars dominate the landscape and debris flows have scoured the land around YTID’s main canal. Physical damage from trees, rocks, debris, and slope destabilization continue to threaten the YTID’s main canal to the point of near catastrophic failure. If the main canal fails, there would be cascading impacts on the multi-billion dollar agricultural industry in the West Yakima area. Recovery and mitigation actions are critical to reduce further potential loss and damages to industries, communities, and the surrounding landscape to which everything else is tied.



*Trees and massive boulders crashed into the canal, damaging walls and weakening its structural integrity. Photo Credit (above and left): Yakima Tieton Irrigation District*

## CASE STUDY: Accessing Diverse Funding Streams for Post-Fire Recovery in North Yakima County, Washington (continued)

### Recovery Efforts

YTID participated in the Burned Area Emergency Recovery (BAER) process at the recommendation of the North Yakima Conservation District (NYCD). However, to fulfill further recovery needs as well as support necessary protective measures, the YTID, with support from the NYCD, has worked tirelessly to acquire funds for recovery and prevention from several different sources:

- **\$1 million** grant from Washington State Department of Commerce to conduct inventory and identify needs. Over 33 priority actions were identified.
- **\$4 million** from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, including crews to help with repair.
- **\$100,000** from Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), made available to specific conservation districts through Washington State Conservation Commission funding mechanisms. This money will address the risk of debris flow and improve slope stability.
- **\$100,000** in emergency grants from Washington Department of Ecology made available due to the threat to the water quality of the Tieton River, which feeds into the Naches River, one of Yakima's water sources. \$50,000 was initially awarded to YTID, but NYCD was able to accept an additional \$50,000 as a partner, ultimately doubling the impact.

### Lessons Learned

**Funding Recovery Requires Creativity to Fill in Gaps.** Funding recovery from fire is tricky, and federal funding mechanisms can be time intensive and difficult to navigate. Even when those funds are acquired, there are inevitably gaps that still need to be filled. YTID and NYCD succeeded in working creatively to find alternative funding sources by reaching out to existing partners and supporters.

#### **Mixed Ownership Requires Proactive Land Management for Fire.**

The land through which the main canal flows has several different owners, each with their own land management goals. Prior to the fire, these entities had not necessarily all come together to address fire concerns collaboratively. Following the fire, the need for a cohesive land management strategy - that incorporated fire as a risk on the land - was made clear. Relying on existing relationships allowed partners to rapidly develop a coordinated effort to respond to the current threat; however, establishing open lines of communication and partnership ahead of time allows for collaboration to occur proactively, rather than reactively amidst the chaos of response and recovery.

**Recovery Planning Matters. Use the Opportunity to Collaborate on Identifying Values at Risk.** The irrigation canal was not included in the Highways 410 and 12 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) or Yakima County's Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP). Historically, CWPP's have focused on protecting private residences and residential infrastructure. After two decades of devastating wildfires in Washington, we're learning it is critical to incorporate infrastructure and values at risk beyond those historically included in wildfire planning efforts by bringing in holistic perspectives on communities and landscapes.



*Slope stability is one of the primary recovery concerns as the already steep slopes have been weakened by debris flows. Photo Credit: Yakima Tieton Irrigation District*