Hanson Ponds Restoration Project

Pits, Roads, Homes, and Levees abound: The Yakima River has been disconnected from its historic floodplains and simplified by development and decades of resource extraction.

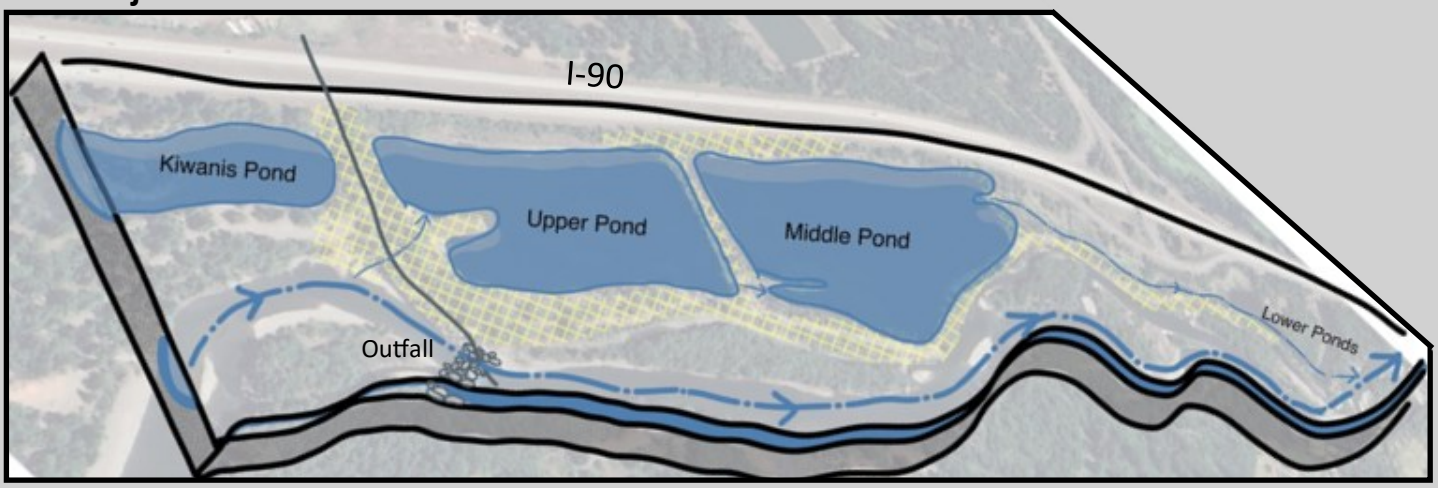
The Hanson Ponds Restoration Project

The City of Cle Elum requested support from the Kittitas Conservation Trust (KCT) in 2019 to reduce the threats the Yakima River has on the Regional Wastewater System. This wastewater system supports Ronald, Roslyn, Cle Elum, South Cle Elum, and Suncadia and is essential infrastructure for our community. KCT saw an opportunity to pair infrastructure protection with floodplain restoration and was successful in securing funding to design and permit the Hanson Ponds Restoration Project. The goals of the project are to protect I-90, Kiwanis Pond, and the Wastewater infrastructure; improve salmon habitat; restore floodplain function; and enhance recreational opportunities.

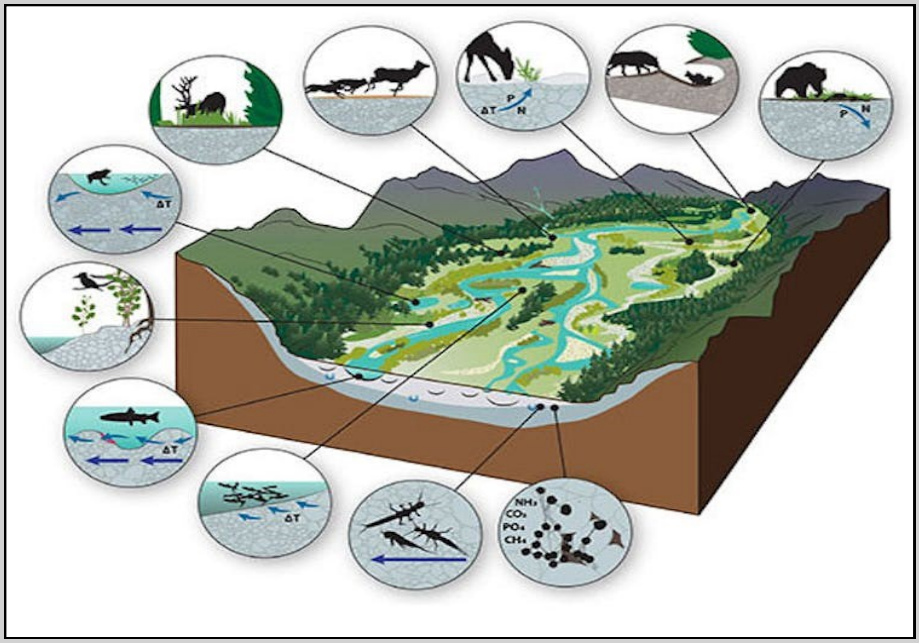
The Infrastructure Problem

Wastewater is cleansed at the Wastewater Treatment Plant then piped under I-90 and discharged into the Yakima River. The discharge site is in a confined reach of the Yakima River that mimics a fire hose and has been working to erode the left bank. Numerous assessments have shown there is imminent risk of the Yakima River abandoning the Wastewater Outfall and migrating into what is now Hanson Ponds threatening I-90. KCT is working to develop a restoration project that would both protect critical infrastructure and restore juvenile Coho, Spring Chinook, steelhead, and resident trout habitat.

The Project Site



The Hanson Ponds site is nearly 100 acres owned and managed by the City of Cle Elum. These ponds are historic borrow pits dug by the WA Dept of Transportation in the 1960s as a source of gravel during the construction of I-90. Due to the warm water temperatures in the pits, they have become ideal habitat for predators like the northern pikeminnow and largemouth bass. These predators are limiting survival of juvenile salmon and trout as they seek refuge during high summer irrigation flows. In addition, a mile long levee was created to buffer the excavation site from the Yakima River. Neither the levee nor the pits were ever restored, and they continue to constrain the Yakima River, disconnecting it from its floodplain. Healthy, intact floodplains are important for our community as they slow floodwaters and reduce erosion. Floodplains also filter runoff to improve water quality, recharge groundwater tables, and provide habitat for a diversity of species.



On Jan 14, 2025, the Cle Elum City Council voted to progress designs that will reopen the Yakima River floodplain, improve salmon habitat, enhance recreational opportunities, and protect critical infrastructure. KCT will continue working with state, federal, tribal, and local partners to develop this important restoration project for our community.

Floodplain connection: A complex, braided river connecting with its floodplain to support plants, animals, and nutrient cycling. *Illustration by Emily Harrington.*

For more information visit: *https://www.kittitasconservationtrust.org/projects/hanson-ponds-restoration-project/*