

Island Watershed, WRIA 6

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Island Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users in determining the best strategies for securing water for a future project or proposal in this area.

The Island Watershed, also known as Water Resource Inventory Area 6 (WRIA 6), consists of Whidbey and Camano Islands along with several smaller islands. The northern part of Whidbey Island has the largest population density of the area with the city of Oak Harbor and the Naval Air Station. The rest of the islands mainly consist of low density rural development.

There are no major rivers in the watershed, and much of the water available for economic use comes from groundwater, which is recharged exclusively from precipitation. The northern and central part of Whidbey Island is situated in the rain shadow of the Olympic Mountains and therefore the watershed has a high variability of rainfall, from 18 inches at Coupeville to 42 inches at Goss Lake. Most of this precipitation arrives during the winter months when water demands are the lowest, and only a fraction becomes available for human and economic uses. The Island Watershed does not benefit from snow pack so during the summer when there is little rain naturally, low stream flows are dependent on groundwater inflow. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

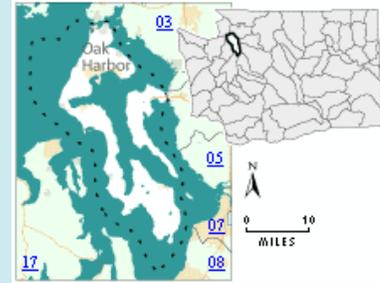
Increasing demands for water from ongoing population growth, declining stream flows and groundwater levels, and the impacts of climate change have put Washington's water supplies at risk. The Island Watershed increasingly lacks water when and where it is needed.

Factors affecting water availability

There are several limiting factors that impact the availability of future use of surface water and groundwater in Island County:

Seawater intrusion

Seawater has intruded into some island aquifers in the coastal areas. This is especially true near Point Partridge, and the northeastern and southern parts of Camano Island. The Department of Ecology



Definitions

Aquifer: A rock formation that is capable of storing and transmitting groundwater.

Mitigation plan: A scientifically-sound plan intended to avoid impairment to existing water rights or capturing water from a closed source.

Permit-exempt well: The state Ground Water Code allows for certain uses of small quantities of groundwater without obtaining a permit from Ecology. (RCW 90.44.050)

Seawater intrusion: The movement of salt water into freshwater aquifers.

(Ecology) will not be able to issue a water right if subsequent pumping of wells will cause contamination of fresh groundwater unless an adequate mitigation plan is submitted and approved by Ecology.

Declining groundwater levels

Declining groundwater levels have been reported in northern Camano Island. Ecology will not be able to issue a water right in this area if it is determined that withdrawing water would further lower these levels, unless an adequate mitigation plan is submitted and approved by Ecology.

Surface waters closed to new uses

Ecology has closed the following surface water source to new appropriations based on recommendations from the state Department of Fish and Wildlife:

- Maxwelton Creek

Furthermore, Department of Fish and Wildlife has recommended that at least ½ of the low flows be maintained in an unnamed creek in Sect 22. T 33N Range 02 East.

Water currently available for new uses

With the exceptions listed above, both surface and groundwater are available for appropriation.

There are currently no limitations on drilling permit-exempt wells for domestic, stock water, irrigation of less than ½ acre, and small industrial supply needs.

Additional options for water supplies

You are encouraged to connect to an existing water system if available. This is the simplest and fastest option.

The groundwater permit exemption allows certain users of small quantities of groundwater (most commonly, single residential well owners) to construct wells and develop their water supplies without obtaining a water right permit from Ecology. For more information about the groundwater permit exemption, refer to <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/SummaryPages/1511016.html>.

The permit exemption may not be available to prospective water users in certain areas that have been closed to further appropriation because there is limited or no water available or saltwater intrusion problems. Check with Ecology staff at the regional office for more information.

If you cannot hook-up to an existing system, or more water is needed than can be obtained from a permit-exempt well, processing your application through the Cost Reimbursement Program may be an option. www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf.

In addition, a water rights change application can be processed with the Island County Water Conservancy Board.

For more information on these and other options, refer to “Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing” www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf.

Pending water right applications in this watershed

Washington water law is based on the “prior appropriation” system, often called “first in time, first in right.” Applications for water from the same source must be processed in the order they are received. (There are certain exceptions, see “Additional options for processing water right applications” above.)

Ecology asks anyone who needs a water right (new, change, or transfer) to submit the pre-application consultation form and meet with us to review your water supply needs and project proposal.

- Apply for a New Water Right
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change_transfer_use.html

The map in this document shows some of the factors that will be considered when evaluating water right permit applications. Here are some information sources to assist you with your research:

- Locate and research water rights on land parcels anywhere in the state (Water Resource Explorer)
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/info/webmap.html>
- Pending Water Right Applications by County
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/tracking-apps.html>
- Subscribe to a water right application RSS feed for a county or WRIA
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/wr_app_rss.html
- WRIA map showing the total number of water right claims, certificates, permits and applications
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/Images/pdf/waterright-wria-maps.pdf>
- Search and view well reports using a variety of search tools
<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/waterresources/map/WCLSWebMap/default.aspx>

For more information

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