

Deschutes Watershed, WRIA 13

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Deschutes 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 Deschutes Watershed consists of the Deschutes River and numerous tributary creeks and streams. This watershed is one of the most intensely farmed basins in western Washington, and the annual precipitation ranges from 40 inches to over 80 inches per year. Most of the precipitation arrives during the winter months when overall water demands are the lowest. During the summer, the snowpack is gone, there is little rain, and naturally low stream flows are dependent on groundwater inflow. At the same time the demand for water for human uses, including irrigation, are at the yearly maximum. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

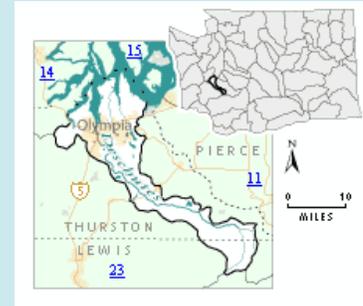
There has also been a significant population increase in WRIA 13 over the past 20 years.

Factors affecting water availability

There is limited water available for new uses in WRIA 13, especially given that river levels need to be maintained to ensure adequate water quality and fish migration.

Much of the water in the Deschutes Watershed has already been spoken for. Increased demands from population growth, low summer and early fall streamflow levels, and impacts from climate change add to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 13, especially during the summer months.

[WAC 173-513](#) is the instream flow rule for the Deschutes River watershed, including Spurgeon Creek and the Woodland Creek and Woodard Creek drainages. The rule was adopted in 1980.



Definitions

Appropriation: The process of legally acquiring the right to specific amounts of the public water resource for beneficial uses.

Instream flows: Flow levels adopted into an administrative rule that create a water right for the stream to protect fish, wildlife, stock watering, recreational uses, and other instream uses and values. Typical instream flow rules now include broader water management strategies.

Mitigation: A scientifically-sound plan to offset the impacts of a proposed water use.

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

WRIA: Water Resources Inventory Area; also known as a watershed or river basin. For environmental administration and planning purposes, Washington is divided up into 62 major watersheds, or WRIs.

The rule closes and partially closes numerous streams to new uses, and adopts instream flows on other streams and creeks. There is no water set aside in reserves for future uses in this watershed.

Applicants seeking new water appropriations will likely need mitigation for the impacts their use of water will have on surface water bodies and on groundwater.

Some areas located near Puget Sound may have the potential for seawater intrusion.

The Squaxin Island Tribe is very concerned about maintaining flows and fish habitat in the watershed. Water right applications and mitigation plans are routinely sent to the Tribe for their review.

Water currently available for new uses

Areas of potential water supply in the Deschutes watershed include various municipal sources and private water supply companies. This is generally the easiest way to obtain a new water supply.

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. In a recent decision, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled that counties must ensure new uses of water (including permit-exempt wells) will not impact instream flows or closed water bodies when it approves building permits or subdivision applications. Even though [the rule adopted by Ecology for this watershed](#) does not limit the use of permit-exempt wells, counties are required under the Growth Management Act to protect streams and other waterbodies in their county. Counties may not issue permits for projects that will rely on a permit-exempt well, unless it determines that the water use will not impact instream flows or closed water bodies.

For more information on the decision, visit <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/WR/nwro/hirst.html>. For more information on the groundwater permit exemption, visit <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/documents/1511016.pdf>.

For more information on how instream flow may impact county approvals, visit Department of Ecology's [Domestic Water Availability Maps](#) and contact your county to find out how these restrictions apply to your project.

Additional options for finding a water supply include processing a water right application through the [Cost Reimbursement Program](#). The applicant may need to develop mitigation to offset the impacts of their water use to surface water.

For more information on these and other options, refer to "[Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing](#)."

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.

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.

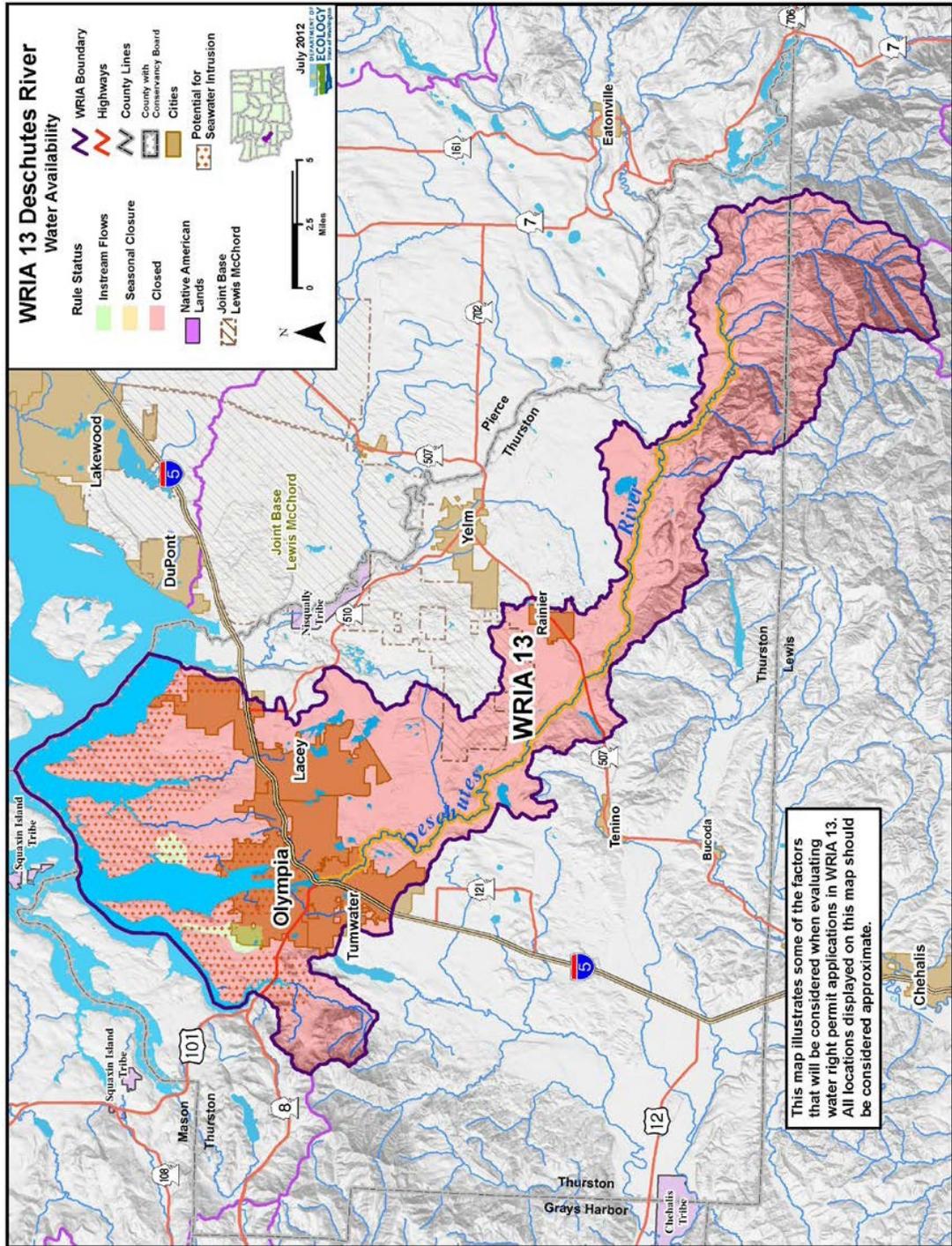
- Apply for a New Water Right
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change_transfer_use.html

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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