

Lower Snake Watershed, WRIA 33

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Lower Snake 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 Lower Snake Watershed is located in eastern Washington and includes a portion of the Snake River and its numerous tributary creeks and streams, lying between its confluences with the Palouse River and the Columbia River. The Snake River originates in the mountains of Idaho and Wyoming.

The annual precipitation in the Lower Snake Watershed ranges from 8 inches per year near its confluence with Columbia River, to a little over 10 inches in the higher elevations. Only a fraction of this precipitation becomes groundwater available for human and economic uses. Most of the precipitation arrives during the winter months, when 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. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

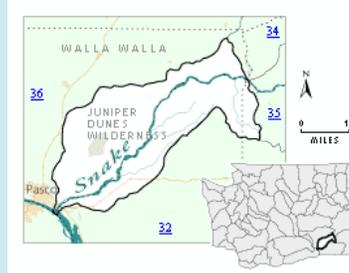
Much of the water in the Lower Snake Watershed has already been spoken for. Increased demands from population growth, declining groundwater levels, and impacts from climate change are adding to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 33, especially during the summer months.

Factors affecting water availability

The Columbia Basin Project (CBP) is a federally authorized project with multiple purposes: irrigation, power production, flood control, municipal water supply, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits. The CBP canal system provides water for much of the agricultural irrigation in the region. Water is imported from the Columbia River and is redistributed through canals and stored groundwater. The CBP has three distinct subareas: Quincy, Odessa and the “508-14.”

A portion of the “508-14” Subarea, established under [WAC 508-14](#) is located within the southwestern area of WRIA 33. This area is

MORE INFORMATION



Definitions

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

Surface water source limitation: A recommendation from the Department of Fish and Wildlife that flows be protected to maintain fish populations. See RCW 77.57.020

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 WRIAs.

Special accommodations
If you need this document in a format for the visually impaired, call the Water Resources Program at 360-407-6872.

Persons with hearing loss, call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability, call 877-833-6341.

characterized by both state water rights and a significant quantity of artificially stored groundwater (ASGW) from the CBP project. It is estimated that all state water within this area has been appropriated.

The Office of Columbia River (OCR) has submitted a filing to amend the rule for the 508-14 subarea. The intent of the filing, in part, is to allocate the ASGW within the subarea. The majority of this water will be allocated to existing applications, but some water may become available for new uses.

The Lower Snake Watershed has administrative restrictions known as Surface Water Source Limitations (SWSLs), which limit water sources in the watershed. Groundwater connected to the surface sources are also subject to SWSL restrictions. These restrictions, along with those specified in [WAC 173-564](#) (Water Resources Management Program for the Main Stem of the Snake River), indicate that most water has been appropriated within the watershed.

In general, the availability of groundwater from bedrock, outside of the boundaries of the CBP, is very limited. These limits include climate, geology and impairment to existing rights. In addition, many areas are in decline, meaning little if any water is available for new consumptive appropriations.

Water supply available for new uses

The Lower Snake watershed is not closed by rule to new water uses. However, water levels are declining and/or water is not legally available, so it is unlikely any water is available for new consumptive appropriation in most areas. Therefore, it is doubtful that any new consumptive water rights will be issued unless the impacts are fully mitigated.

The OCR is aggressively pursuing water supply development opportunities throughout the Columbia Basin. You can find additional information at the OCR Web site at: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html.

The Lake Roosevelt Incremental Storage Release is an impoundment/reservoir of the Columbia River watershed. The OCR is currently pursuing development of water supplies on Lake Roosevelt to benefit instream and out of stream uses through storage, conservation, and regional water management agreements. Water for new appropriations from this project is limited to municipal and industrial supply from the Columbia River mainstem.

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. Check with Ecology staff at the regional office for more information.

Additional options for more expedited processing of new or change applications include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Proposing mitigation to offset the impacts to surface water and groundwater.
- Processing your change application with the Walla Walla or Franklin County Water Conservancy Board.
- Processing your application through the Cost Reimbursement Program.
www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf.

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.

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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