

Wenatchee Watershed, WRIA 45

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Wenatchee 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.

Many areas of central Washington are arid, receiving less than 20 inches of rain annually. Most of this 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. 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.

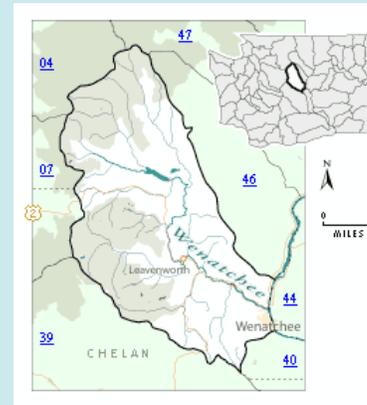
Much of the water in the Wenatchee Watershed has already been spoken for. Increased demands from population growth, declining groundwater levels, and impacts from climate change are adding to the challenge of finding new water supplies in Water Resource Inventory Area 45, especially during the summer months.

Factors affecting water availability

In 2004, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation filed notice with the Department of Ecology that the United States intends to make examinations and surveys for the utilization of the unappropriated waters of the Columbia River and its tributaries above Priest Rapids Dam, pursuant to Section 90.40.030 of the Revised Code of Washington. The withdrawal of these waters from future appropriations is currently in effect until December 23, 2014, with an exemption for a limited quantity of water. All new applications for surface water and groundwater connected to surface water within WRIAs 45, 46 and 47 are limited not to exceed 21,140 ac-ft.

Ecology cannot process any applications filed after December 28, 2004 for new rights to surface water or connected groundwater unless the applicant obtains a release from the Bureau of Reclamation or until the withdrawal has expired. The withdrawal may be extended, and Ecology expects BOR to request an extension before the withdrawal expires.

Stream flows are another major limiting factor in this basin. An instream flow rule was developed in 1983, and amended in 2008 as part of watershed planning. The Wenatchee Planning Unit, led by local governments and landowners, worked cooperatively with stakeholder groups, and state and federal agencies to develop local solutions to protect senior water rights, maintain basin ecosystems, and to meet water resource management needs.



Definitions

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. WRIAs were defined by [Chapter 173-500 WAC](#) in 1976.

Subbasins are smaller drainage basins that together make up a WRIA. Subbasins are generally named for the principle creek or other surface water that runoff flows to.

Instream flows are flow levels adopted into rule that create a water right for the stream to protect fish, wildlife, stockwatering, recreational uses, and other instream uses and values.

Factors in the instream flow rule that limit water availability in the basin include:

- Specified levels of protected instream flows (set in [WAC 173-545-050](#) and [060](#), see to meet the objectives of the Wenatchee Watershed Plan (see www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/wrias/Planning/45.html). Water rights established after the rule adoption are subject to the instream flows and so must curtail water withdrawals when actual stream flows drop below the adopted instream flow levels.
- Maximum allocation limits, set in [WAC 173-545-100](#), that limit the water available during periods of high flow. Ecology may issue water rights which total up to the maximum allocation limits for specific streams at specific times, but these withdrawals are also subject to the instream flows.

In addition, except through an interim reservation created in [WAC 173-545-090 \(1\)\(d\)\(vi\)](#), the Chumstick Creek subbasin has been closed temporarily to all future appropriations until Ecology either:

- Adopts a rule establishing instream flows;
- Closes Chumstick Creek permanently; or
- Determines that instream flows or closure is not required.

The Columbia River is a major source of existing surface water use in the basin, but the river is highly regulated for power generation and instream flow protection. Applications for surface water withdrawals from the mainstem Columbia River are subject to the Instream Resource Protection Program for the Columbia River, as are any proposed groundwater withdrawals determined to have a significant and direct impact on the Columbia River. (For more information, see <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-563>.)

Three adjudications have also taken place in the basin and include Icicle Creek, Chumstick Creek, and Nahahum Canyon. Prior adjudications in an area are an indication that most, if not all, of the available water has already been allocated.

Water supply available for new uses

There is currently four cubic feet per second (cfs) of water set aside in a reservation for future appropriation in this basin. The Wenatchee Instream Resources Protection Program defines allowed uses of the reserved water in [WAC 173-545-090](#). Surface water and groundwater availability, outside of the reservation, is currently very limited throughout the basin, especially in light of the Bureau of Reclamation's withdrawal.

The Office of Columbia River (OCR) is aggressively pursuing water supply development opportunities throughout the Columbia Basin. You may find further information on these efforts on the OCR Web Page at: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html. Some projects are being studied in WRIA 45 that could make water available in the future. Additionally, OCR has developed supplies on the Columbia River mainstem that may satisfy surface water and adjacent groundwater applications in WRIA 45 (e.g. Lake Roosevelt Incremental Storage Release Project).

The 1980 Columbia River Rule, [WAC 173-563-020](#), requires a consultation process for any new surface water application (or groundwater application that would have significant and direct impacts on the Columbia River).

The purpose of the consultation process is to inform Ecology whether “the use of such waters will be, if deemed necessary, subjected to instream flow protection or mitigation conditions determined on a case-by-case basis through the evaluation conducted with the agencies and tribes”. The OCR projects described above are using this consultation process to develop mitigation projects that allow Ecology to issue new water right permits. New applications in the consultation process not covered by OCR mitigation would likely require independent mitigation to address fishery impacts.

Additional options for finding a water supply include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Processing a change application with the Chelan County Water Conservancy Board.
- Processing an 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.

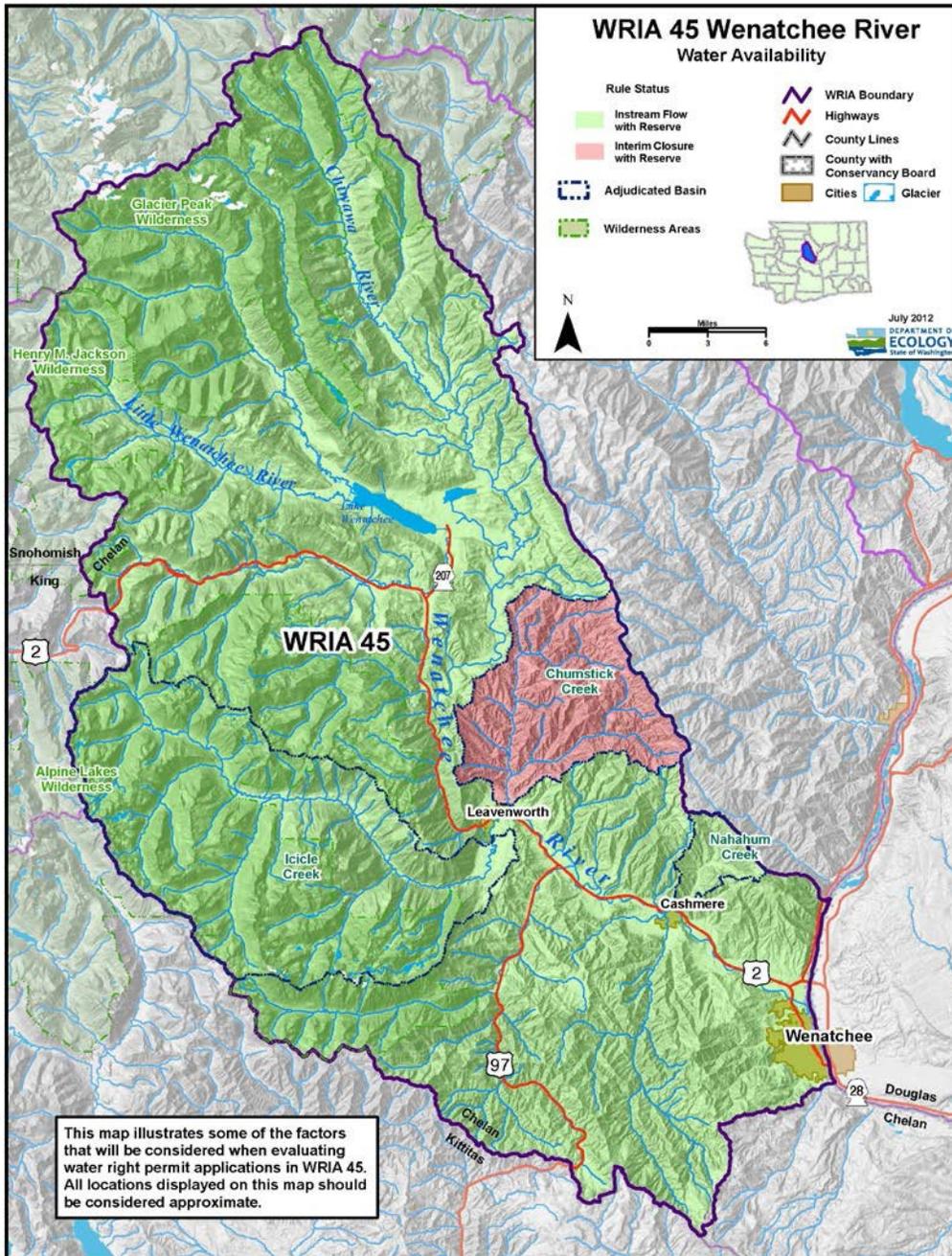
- Apply for a New Water Right
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change_transfer_use.html

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>

Further Information

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