

Walla Walla Watershed, WRIA 32

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Walla Walla Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users in determining the likelihood of obtaining a new water right for a future project or proposal in this area.

The Walla Walla Watershed located in southeastern Washington includes the Walla Walla River and the Touchet River with their numerous tributary creeks and streams. Both rivers originate in the Blue Mountains with the Walla Walla River beginning from the Oregon portion of the range. The annual precipitation in the Walla Walla Watershed ranges from less than 10 inches per year near its confluence with Columbia River, to 45 inches per year in the higher elevation mountainous areas. 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.

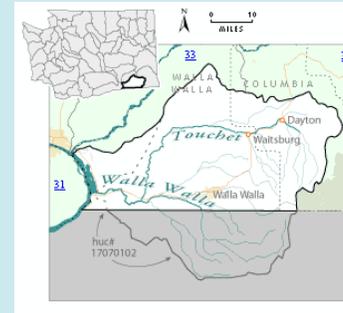
Much of the water in the Walla Walla Watershed has already been spoken for. Increased demands from population growth, declining groundwater levels, and impacts from climate change are adding to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 32, especially during the summer months.

Factors affecting water availability

This basin has an instream flow regulation in order to protect senior water rights, maintain the current basin ecosystem, and to meet further water resource management objectives established by WAC 173-532. Some major points of the rule are listed below.

- All rivers and streams in the basin are seasonally closed to any further consumptive appropriation from May 1 to November 30 with the exception that the Walla Walla River and all of its tributaries between Stateline and Detour Road at MP 5a, and Mill Creek and all of its tributaries from the confluence with the Walla Walla to the headwaters shall be closed from June 1 to November 30.
- Based on the hydrogeology of the basin, the department finds that gravel aquifers in the basin are hydraulically connected to surface waters in the basin. Therefore, the gravel aquifers are closed. Exception to this closure is provided for future permit exempt groundwater withdrawals as prescribed in [WAC 173-532-050](#) and for non-consumptive groundwater use as prescribed in [WAC 173-532-045](#).

MORE INFORMATION



Definitions

Adjudication: A legal process conducted through a superior court to determine the extent and validity of existing water rights.

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

- Future permits to withdraw surface water during non-closure periods shall be limited to environmental enhancement projects as described in [WAC 173-532-055](#).
- All unappropriated surface waters and groundwater from the gravel aquifer for which an exception to the closure does not apply, are hereby appropriated during the above periods of closure for purposes of protecting and preserving fish and wildlife and other instream values.
- New permit exempt well-constructed into the gravel aquifer, in areas outside of Burbank that are zoned for 10 acres or less per residence, are limited in use to the following ([WAC 173-532-050](#)):
 1. Maximum daily withdrawal for in-house use is not to exceed 1,250 gallons per day.
 2. Maximum daily withdrawal for stockwater use is not to exceed 700 gallons per day.
 3. Any outdoor use of water under the exemption must be mitigated prior to that use.
 4. Withdrawal of water must be recorded monthly and reported to Ecology annually.
- Doan Creek, Dry Creek, Upper Stone Creek, Touchet River and Walla Walla River are adjudications that have been completed within WRIA 32.

In general, availability and yield of groundwater from bedrock in this WRIA is very limited by climate and geology. 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 Walla Walla watershed is, for the most part, closed to new water uses. However, surface and groundwater permits may be issued only if any one of the following conditions applies:

1. The proposed water use is non-consumptive ([WAC 173-532-045](#)).
2. The proposed groundwater use is from the basalt aquifer, and will not:
 - a. Impair existing water rights;
 - b. Affect any closed surface source where instream flows have not been established;
and
 - c. Affect any closed gravel aquifer.
3. The proposed surface water use would occur only during non-closure periods and is intended for an environmental enhancement project, as defined in [WAC 173-532-020\(6\)](#) and meeting the criteria listed in [WAC 173-532-055](#).

There is no limitation on drilling permit exempt water wells, within areas zoned larger than 10 acres per residence or the well is constructed into bedrock. Zoning with less than 10 acres per residence are subject to the above restrictions. A non-restricted permit exempt well is allowed only for small domestic uses, stock water, irrigation of less than 0.5 acre, and small industrial supply needs.

The Office of Columbia River (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.

Additional options for finding a water supply include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership www.wallawallawatershed.org/participate
- Proposing mitigation to offset the impacts to surface water and groundwater.
- Processing a change application with the Walla Walla 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](#)”

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>

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

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

