

Esquatzel Coulee Watershed, WRIA 36

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Esquatzel Coulee Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users to secure water for a future project or proposal in this area.

The Esquatzel Coulee Watershed located in eastern Washington includes a number of small streams that are tributary to the Columbia River. Many of these smaller streams are seasonal.

The annual precipitation in the Esquatzel Coulee Watershed ranges from 7 inches per year in the Mattawa area, to 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. As spring turns to summer, snowpack melts. This causes stream flows to increase, but after the snowpack is gone, stream flow declines considerably. River flows then become dependent on groundwater inflow, late summer glacial melting, and rare precipitation events. This means that both groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

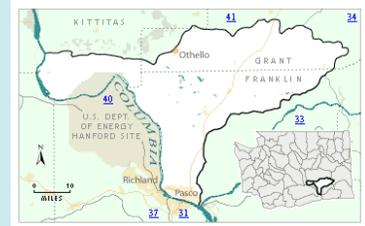
Factors affecting water availability

Much of the water in the Esquatzel Coulee Watershed has already been spoken for. Increasing demands from population growth, declining groundwater levels, and impacts from climate change are adding to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 36, especially during the summer months.

Surface Water Source Limitations

The Esquatzel Coulee watershed has administrative restrictions known as Surface Water Source Limitations (SWSL), which limit most water sources in the watershed. Groundwater connected to the surface sources are also subject to SWSL restrictions. These restrictions indicate that most water has been appropriated within the watershed.

MORE INFORMATION



Definitions

Consumptive use: A use of water that diminishes the amount of water in the water source.

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.

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 WRIsAs.

Columbia Basin Project

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.” Portions of two subareas are included in WRIA 36.

A portion of the Odessa Subarea, established under [WACs 173-128A](#) and [173-130A](#), is located within the northeastern area of WRIA 36. The majority of this subarea has not been developed with imported water and is often referred to as the second half of the CBP. Groundwater levels in the Odessa Subarea aquifer are declining rapidly in many places and as a result, groundwater is not available for new uses.

A portion of the “508-14” Subarea, established under [WAC 508-14](#) encompasses the western area of WRIA 36. This area is 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.

In general, the availability of groundwater from bedrock, outside of the boundaries of the Columbia Basin Project (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 uses.

The Office of the Columbia River

The Office of Columbia River (OCR) is aggressively pursuing water supply development opportunities throughout the Columbia Basin. The Office of Columbia River (OCR) has submitted a filing to amend the rule for the 508-14 subarea. The intent of the filing is, in part, to allocate the ASGW within the subarea. Most of this water will be allocated to existing applications, but some water may become available for other appropriations.

The Lake Roosevelt is an impoundment/reservoir of the Columbia River. The OCR is also 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. New appropriations will be limited to municipal and industrial supply from the Columbia River mainstem.

You can find additional information at the OCR Web site at:
www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html.

Pending water right applications in this watershed

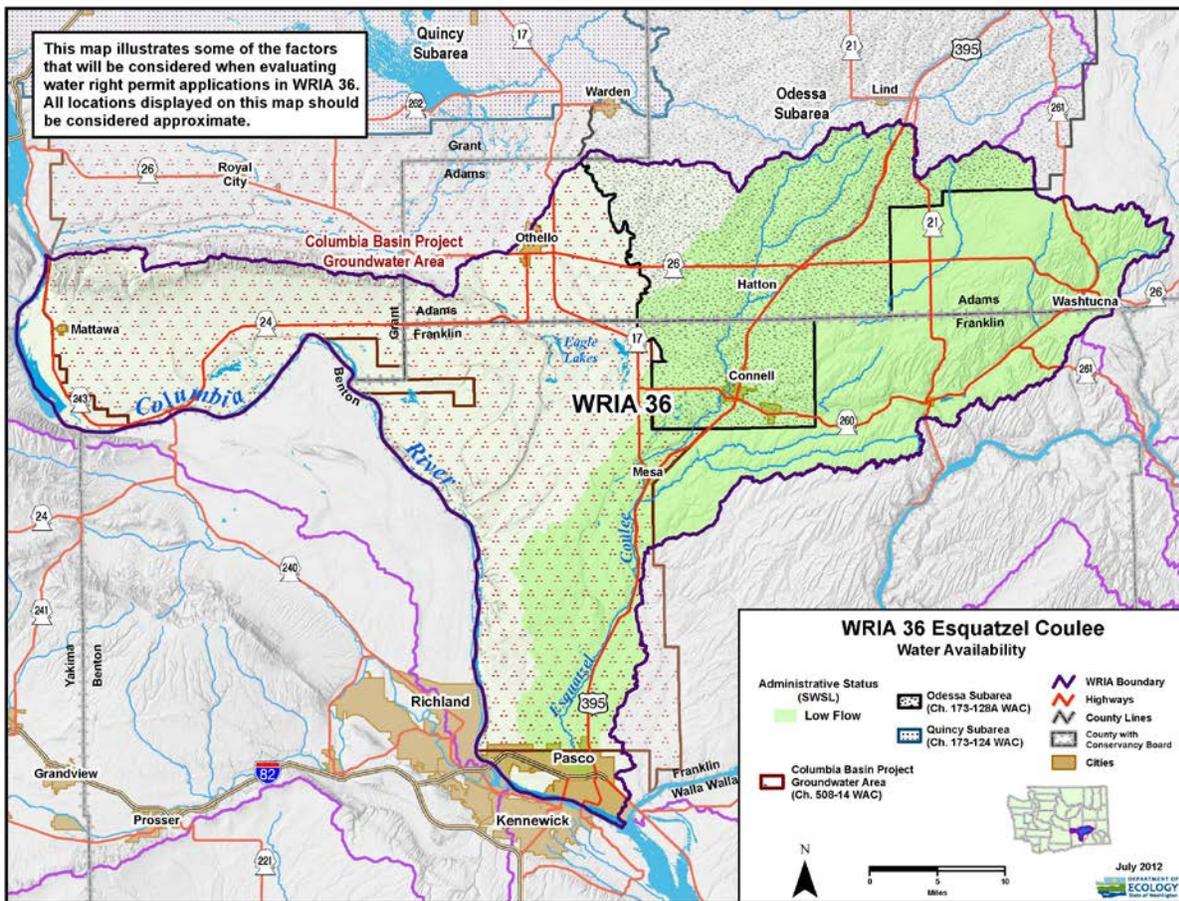
Washington water law is based on the “prior appropriation” system, often called “first in time, first in right.” Applications for water from the same source must be processed in the order they are received. Since there is a backlog of pending applications, if water becomes available, prospective applicants are advised to consider the Cost Reimbursement Program, which can help expedite application processing (See: www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf). For information on the total number of water right claims, certificates, permits, and applications in this watershed, refer to the map:
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/Images/pdf/waterright-wria-maps.pdf>.

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.

- Pre-Application Form
<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/publications/ecy070440.pdf>
- Apply for a New Water Right
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer an existing 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
- Search and view well reports using a variety of search tools
<http://apps.ecy.wa.gov/welllog/>

Other water supply options

Although the Esquatzel Coulee watershed is not officially closed to new water uses, surface and groundwater levels are declining and/or water is not legally available in most areas. Therefore, it is currently unlikely that Ecology can issue any new consumptive water right permits unless the impacts are fully mitigated.

Certain uses of small quantities of groundwater (most commonly single residences) are allowed under the groundwater permit exemption (RCW 90.44.050) to use water without first obtaining a water right permit from Ecology. Such a use is only exempt from the permitting process. It is important to remember that these water uses remain subject to all other provisions of the water code, including the seniority system, and can be regulated to protect existing water rights. For more information about the groundwater permit exemption, refer to www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf.

Additional options 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 from your withdrawal.
- Processing a change application for an existing water right through the Franklin 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.

For more information

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