

Grand Coulee Watershed, WRIA 42

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Grand 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 Grand Coulee Watershed located in eastern Washington includes a number of reservoirs, small lakes and streams. The two reservoirs of note are Banks Lake and Billy Clapp Lake. These are used in part as control reservoirs for the Columbia Basin Project and are supplied by water diverted from the Columbia River. In addition, many of the smaller streams and some of the lakes are seasonal.

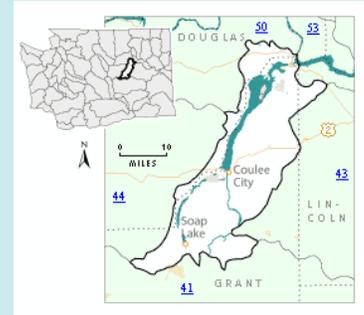
The annual precipitation in the Grand Coulee Watershed ranges from 7 inches per year in the Soap Lake area, to 12 inches in the higher elevations. Only a fraction of this precipitation becomes groundwater available for human and economic uses. Most of the precipitation arrives during the winter months, 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.

Factors affecting water availability

Much of the water in the Grand Coulee 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 42, especially during the summer months.

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.” Two of these areas are located in WRIA 42.

MORE INFORMATION



Definitions

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

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.

A small portion of the Odessa Subarea, established under [WACs 173-128A](#) and [173-130A](#), is located within the southeastern area of WRIA 42. The majority of this subarea has not been developed with imported water and is often referred to as the second half 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 Quincy Subarea, established under [WACs 173-124](#) and [173-134A](#) is located within the southern area of WRIA 42. This area is characterized by both state water rights and the unique “Quincy Basin” (QB) permit for artificially stored groundwater (ASGW) from the CBP. All state water within this area has been legally appropriated. The reserve of artificially-stored groundwater under QB permits has been appropriated or is spoken for under existing applications. The reserve of water was set aside for permit exempt wells within the Quincy Subarea maybe depleted and as such, future permit exempt wells may become restricted.

The Grand Coulee watershed has administrative restrictions known as Surface Water Source Limitations (SWSLs), 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.

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 further appropriation

The Grand Coulee watershed is not officially closed to new water uses (appropriations) outside of the Quincy Subarea. 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.

Although all of the water under the QB program is currently spoken for, an application can be filed to wait in line until water becomes available. Ecology will issue additional permit issuances as water is returned to the program due to reductions or cancellations of existing permitted projects.

The Lake Roosevelt Incremental Storage Release is an impoundment / reservoir of the Columbia River watershed. The Office of Columbia River (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 under this project, for new appropriations, is limited to municipal and industrial supply from the Columbia River main stream.

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.

The groundwater permit exemption allows certain users of small quantities of groundwater (most commonly, single residence 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 www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf.

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 our Eastern Regional Office for more information.

Additional options

- 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 Grant 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. Due to the backlog of pending applications, prospective applicants are advised to consider the Cost Reimbursement Program, which can help expedite application processing (See: www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf). Please be aware though, using the Cost Reimbursement Program will not help you to obtain a water right permit where water is not available.

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. Links to application forms are provided below:

- 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 we consider when evaluating water right permit applications. Here are some additional 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/>

For more information

Eastern Regional Office
Water Resources Program
4601 N. Monroe St.
Spokane, WA 99205-1295
509-329-3400

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.

