

## Upper Crab-Wilson Watershed, WRIA 43

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

The Upper Crab-Wilson Watershed, located in eastern Washington, includes that portion of the Upper Crab Creek above Stratford and Wilson Creek. In addition, there are numerous tributary creeks and streams of which most are seasonal.

The annual precipitation in the Upper Crab-Wilson Watershed ranges from 8 inches per year near Stratford, to 15 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.

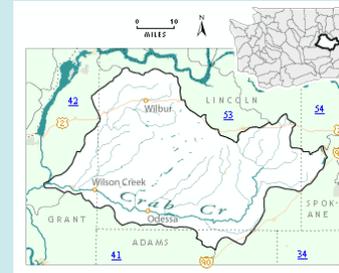
### Factors affecting water availability

Much of the water in the Upper Crab-Wilson 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 43, especially during the summer months.

The WRIA 43 Planning Unit has completed an instream flow study. However, because of disagreements about the proposed flow numbers, the watershed plan did not include numerical instream flow recommendations.

Located in WRIA 43, 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

### MORE INFORMATION



#### Definitions

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

**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 limitations (SWSLs):** A determination by State Fish and Wildlife that water is not available based on needs for fish. See RCW 77.55.050.

**WRIA:** Water Resources Inventory Area; also known as a watershed or river basin.

groundwater. The CBP has three distinct subareas: Quincy, Odessa, and the “508-14.” Portions of two of those areas are within WRIA 43.

A portion of the Odessa Subarea, established under [WACs 173-128A](#) and [173-130A](#), encompasses the southwestern area of WRIA 43. 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 small portion of the Quincy Subarea, established under [WACs 173-124](#) and [173-134A](#) is located within the extreme western area of WRIA 43. This area is characterized by both state water rights and the unique “Quincy Basin” (QB) permit for artificially stored groundwater 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.

### **Adjudications**

Water rights have been adjudicated in Crab Creek (between Sylvan Lake & Odessa) and the South Fork of Crab Creek. In general, most of the water in these adjudicated basins has been appropriated and new appropriations are not available.

### **Groundwater**

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.

The reserve of water set aside for permit exempt wells within the Quincy Subarea may be depleted and as such, future permit exempt wells may become restricted.

### **Surface water**

The Upper Crab-Wilson 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. In addition, Wilson Creek is “closed” by SWSL, meaning the water body is closed to new uses. These restrictions indicate that most water has been appropriated within the watershed.

### **Water supply available for new uses**

The Upper Crab-Wilson watershed is not officially closed to new water uses 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 new permits as water is returned to the program, due to reductions or cancellations of existing permitted projects.

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](http://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 the regional office for more information.

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](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html).

### **Additional options for water supplies**

- 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 Lincoln County Water Conservancy Board.
- Processing your application through the Cost Reimbursement Program.  
[www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf](http://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](http://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](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf)). Please be aware though, using the Cost Reimbursement Program will not help you get a water right permit where there is no water 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](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](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**

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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.*

