

Colville Watershed, WRIA 59

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

The Colville Watershed is located in eastern Washington and includes the Colville River and its numerous tributary creeks and streams.

The annual precipitation in the Colville Watershed ranges from 21 inches per year in the area of the City of Colville to 40 inches in the higher mountainous areas. Only a fraction of this precipitation becomes 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 Colville 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 59, especially during the summer months.

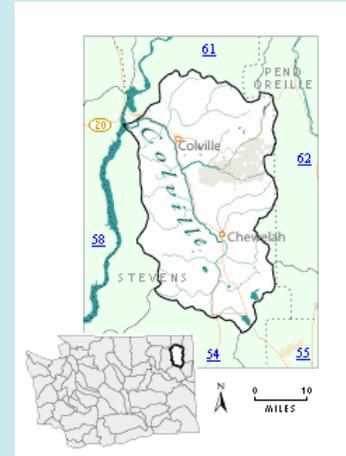
Factors affecting water availability

U.S. Bureau Withdrawal

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 un-appropriated 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.

All new applications for surface water and groundwater connected to surface water within WRIA 59 cannot be processed until a release from the Bureau of Reclamation is obtained, or the withdrawal has expired. The withdrawal may be extended, and Ecology expects BOR to request an extension before the withdrawal expires.

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.

Mitigation plan: A scientifically-sound plan intended to avoid impairment to existing water rights or capturing water from a closed source.

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.

Adjudications

Bulldog Creek, Chewelah Creek, Deer Creek, Hoffman Creek, Jumpoff Joe Creek/Lake, Narcisse Creek, Sherwood Creek, Spring Creek, and Thomason Creek are adjudications that have been completed within WRIA 59. An adjudication was begun but never completed for Mill Creek. In general, most of the water in these adjudicated basins has been appropriated and new appropriations are not available.

Instream flow regulation

The Colville 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 173-559.

- Ecology has determined that no water is available for further consumptive appropriation in streams tributary to the Colville River. Therefore, these tributary streams are closed to further consumptive appropriation except for reservoir storage from November 1 through May 31.
- The Upper Colville River and Lower Colville River will be closed to further consumptive appropriation from July 16 through September 30.
- Deer Lake, Loon Lake, Waitts Lake, Jumpoff Joe Lake, White Mud Lake, Heritage Lake and Thomas Lake are closed to further consumptive appropriation for specified periods of the year.
- The appropriation of groundwater shall be subject to the same conditions as surface water uses.

Water supply available for new uses

The Colville watershed is generally closed to new water uses with the exception of the Colville River from October 1 to July 15. Therefore, any new rights would be seasonal (interruptible), or the impacts of the water use would need to be fully offset (mitigated). In addition, appropriation of water from streams tributary to the Colville River for out of stream storage and on-stream storage shall be subject to the base flows recommended in the Instream Resources Protection Program rule, [WAC 173-559](#).

In some situations, surface water applications for single in-house domestic use or stock watering may be approved if no alternate source of water supply is available and the proposed use will not impair existing water rights.

The Lake Roosevelt Incremental Storage Release is an impoundment/reservoir of the Columbia River watershed. The Office of Columbia River 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 residential well owners) to construct wells and develop their water supplies without obtaining a water right permit from Ecology. In a recent decision, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled that counties must ensure new uses of water (including permit-exempt wells) will not impact instream flows or closed water bodies when it approves building permits or subdivision applications. Even though the rule adopted by Ecology for this watershed does not limit the use of permit-exempt wells, counties are required under the Growth Management Act to protect streams and other waterbodies in their county. Counties may not issue permits for projects that will rely on a permit-exempt well, unless it determines that the water use will not impact instream flows or closed water bodies.

For more information on the decision, visit <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/WR/nwro/hirst.html>. For more information on the groundwater permit exemption, visit <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/documents/1511016.pdf>.

For more information on how instream flow may impact county approvals, visit Department of Ecology's [Domestic Water Availability Maps](#) and contact your county to find out how these restrictions apply to your project.

Additional options include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Processing a change application with the Stevens County Water Conservancy Board.
- Processing your application through the Cost Reimbursement Program. Refer to www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf. The applicant will likely need to develop a mitigation strategy to offset any impacts their water use will have on surface waters.

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.

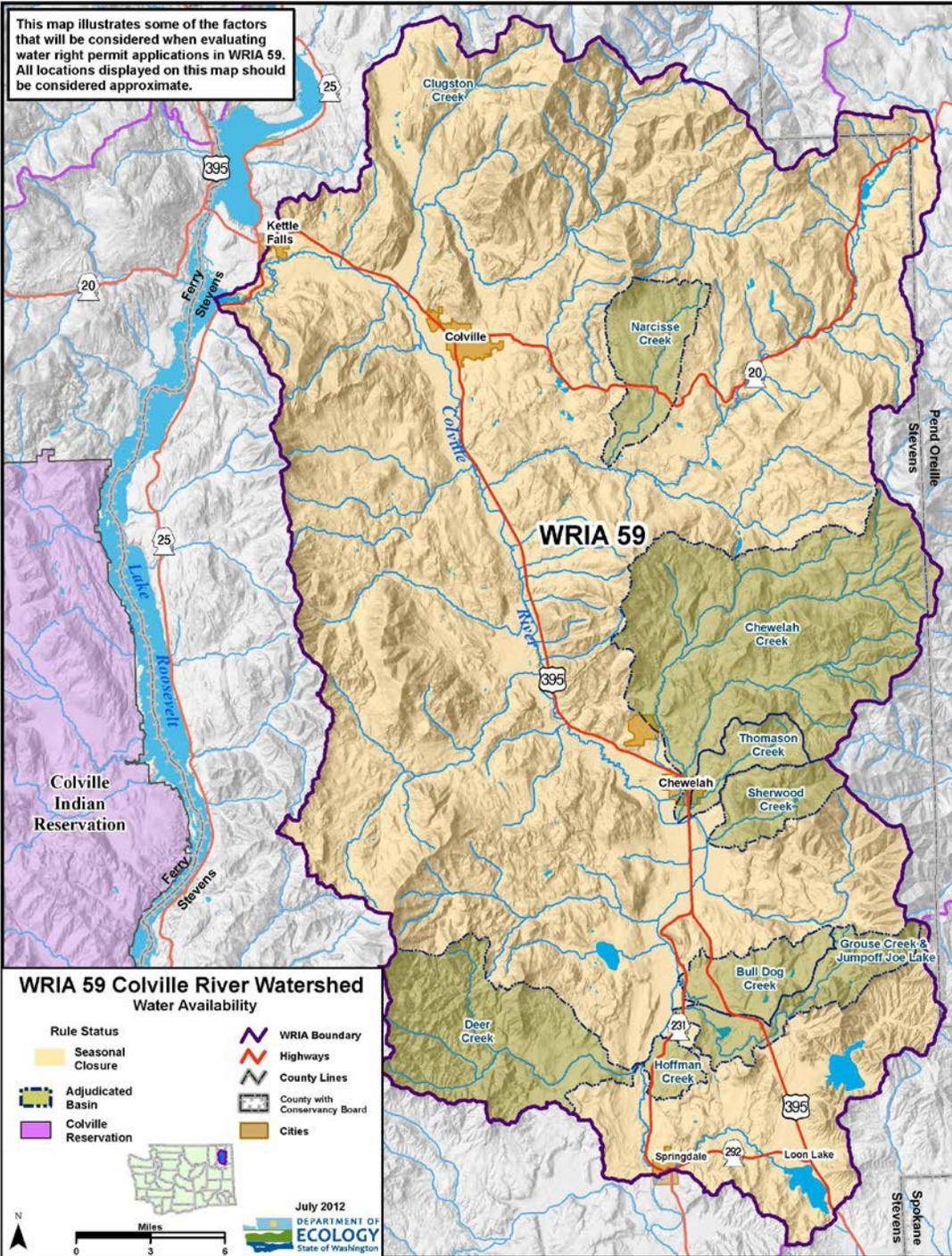
- Apply for a New Water Right
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change_transfer_use.html

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>

For more information

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