



Focus

Finding water to restore streams

Introducing Washington Water Acquisition Program

River basins targeted for water-right acquisitions (see map pg 2)

Nooksack
Elwha/Dungeness
Quilcene/Snow
Snohomish
Cedar/Sammamish
Duwamish/Green
Chambers/Clover
Puyallup/White
Methow
Okanogan
Wenatchee
Upper Yakima
Naches
Lower Yakima
Middle Snake
Walla Walla

For more Information
Visit our webpage:

[www.ecy.wa.gov/
programs/wr/
wrhome.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/wrhome.html)

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Join the Water Resources email list at www.ecy.wa.gov
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Increasing stream flows in critical river basins

The state departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife and Washington Conservation Commission have launched the Washington Water Acquisition Program, a voluntary program designed to increase stream flows in 16 watersheds (see list) with vulnerable fish populations. The program has strong support from a variety of local, state, federal and tribal governments as well as private organizations.

How the program works

The water acquisition program gives farmers, ranchers and other water right holders an opportunity to join in state fish recovery efforts by selling, leasing or donating their water rights to streams where critically low flows limit fish survival. Water rights obtained through the program will assure that the amount of water specified will be left in the original stream to enhance flows. The state has developed criteria and guidance to make sure all participants receive fair market value. Acquisitions will be targeted in areas that will most help fish.

Ways to participate

To participate, you can:

Sell all or part of your water right:

- Water will be held permanently in trust by the state.

Lease all or part of your water right:

- Long-term leases have a higher priority.
- Water placed in the program is not subject to relinquishment.

Donate all or part of your water right on a permanent or temporary basis:

- Permanent donations have a higher priority.
- When the donation period ends, you'll receive the same amount back that was contributed.
- Water placed in the program is not subject to relinquishment.
- Donations may qualify as a charitable tax deduction.

Those already involved in the state **Water Irrigation Efficiencies Program** can voluntarily place all or part of their saved water into state trust to enhance stream flows. The dollar value of the water set aside to improve flows must at least be equal to the amount of public grant money invested in the conservation measure or irrigation efficiency.

Ecology is an equal-opportunity employer

In some watersheds, fish populations in peril

Over the last 10 years, salmon and fish numbers have dropped dramatically. The decline in populations has been severe enough that many fish are now listed as endangered or threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. Fish need plenty of cool, clean water and accessible habitat to survive and thrive. In many watersheds, water withdrawals have significantly lowered stream flows or altered the seasonal distribution of water. In summer and fall when fish need water for migration and spawning, sufficient stream flows may not be there. Low flows also raise water temperatures and concentrate pollutants that can sicken or kill fish.

Important interventions to provide sufficient stream flows for fish

One tool available under existing state water law is to set “instream” flows. However, flow levels adopted by rule are junior to previously existing water rights. Simply setting new or amending existing stream flow rules in basins with chronic low-flow conditions will not necessarily increase water available to fish. The water right acquisition program is an important tool to support fish survival. Water right acquisitions are particularly well-suited to small streams and tributaries where saving even small amounts of water can be particularly beneficial for fish.

