

Snohomish River Watershed, WRIA 7

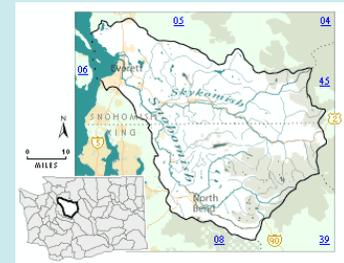
This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Snohomish Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users in determining the best strategies for securing water for a future project or proposal in this area.

The Snohomish Watershed, also known as Water Resource Inventory Area 7 (WRIA 7), comprises the northeastern portion of King County and south central Snohomish County and includes the city of Everett and its adjacent suburban areas. On its west side it is bounded by Puget Sound and its east side includes portions of the Cascade Mountain range. This watershed has significant urban development in its western portion and large areas of agricultural development along the Snohomish River and some of its tributaries.

This watershed includes the Snohomish River and its major tributaries; the Snoqualmie and Skykomish Rivers which originate in the Cascade Mountains. The watershed includes various smaller streams such as Pilchuck, Sultan, Raging, and Tolt Rivers. The South Fork of the Tolt River provides about 30% of the drinking water for the greater Seattle area.

Average precipitation ranges from 30-35 inches per year in the coastal areas to over 180 inches in some parts of the mountains. Most of this precipitation arrives during the winter months when water demands are the lowest, and only a fraction becomes available for human and economic uses. During the summer, the snowpack is gone; there is little rain so low stream flows are dependent on groundwater inflow. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

Most water in the watershed is already legally spoken for. Increasing demands for water from ongoing population growth, declining groundwater levels in some areas and the impacts of climate change have put Washington's water supplies at risk. The Snohomish Watershed increasingly lacks water when and where it is needed, particularly during the summer months.



Definitions

Instream flow: A stream flow protected in a rule. These rules specify the amount of water needed in a particular place for a defined time, and typically follow seasonal variations. They are the flow levels needed in the river to protect and preserve instream resources and uses.

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

Non-consumptive use: A use of water that does not diminish the quantity or quality of water in the water source.

Permit-exempt well: The state Ground Water Code allows for certain uses of small quantities of groundwater without obtaining a permit from Ecology. (RCW 90.44.050)

Seawater intrusion: The movement of salt water into freshwater aquifers.

Factors affecting water availability

Instream Resources Protection Program rule

WRIA 7 has an Instream Resources Protection Program rule ([WAC 173-507](#)) to protect senior water rights, maintain a healthy ecosystem and to meet future water management objectives. Such rules are required by state law ([RCW 90.54](#)).

All new water withdrawals in the Snohomish River watershed are subject to the instream flows established in the rule. Therefore any new water rights will be interrupted when instream flows in the Pilchuck, Skykomish, Snohomish, Snoqualmie, Sultan and Tolt Rivers are not met.

Obtaining a new non-interruptible (year-round) water right in this area will likely be a very difficult, and expensive process due to potential adverse impacts on these protected streams and rivers. It is likely that applicants will need to mitigate to secure a non-interruptible supply.

Closures

The following surface water sources -- and any groundwater connected to them -- are closed year-round to further appropriations (unless mitigated). The closures are based on recommendations by the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

- Griffin Creek
- Harris Creek
- Little Pilchuck Creek
- May Creek
- Patterson Creek
- Quilceda Creek
- Raging River
- Bodell Creek (a tributary of the Pilchuck River).

Tribal Reservation and involvement

The Tulalip Indian Reservation lands are within WRIA 7. Federally Reserved Rights are not quantified at this time and thus the legal availability of water in these areas is undetermined. Additionally, the Tulalip Tribes and Snoqualmie Tribe are very concerned about maintaining flows and fish habitat in the entire basin. By request, Ecology notifies the Tulalip tribe of all new water right applications and decisions.

Coastal areas of Puget Sound

Any water withdrawals located in the coastal areas of Puget Sound are evaluated for the risk of seawater intrusion into existing fresh groundwater supplies. Coastal applicants may need to develop an adequate mitigation plan to address this risk.

Water currently available for new uses

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 for processing water right applications

Additional options for more expedited processing of new or change applications include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Processing your application through the Cost Reimbursement Program. The applicant may need to develop mitigation to offset the impacts to surface water from their water use. 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. (There are certain exceptions, see “Additional options for processing water right applications” above.)

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

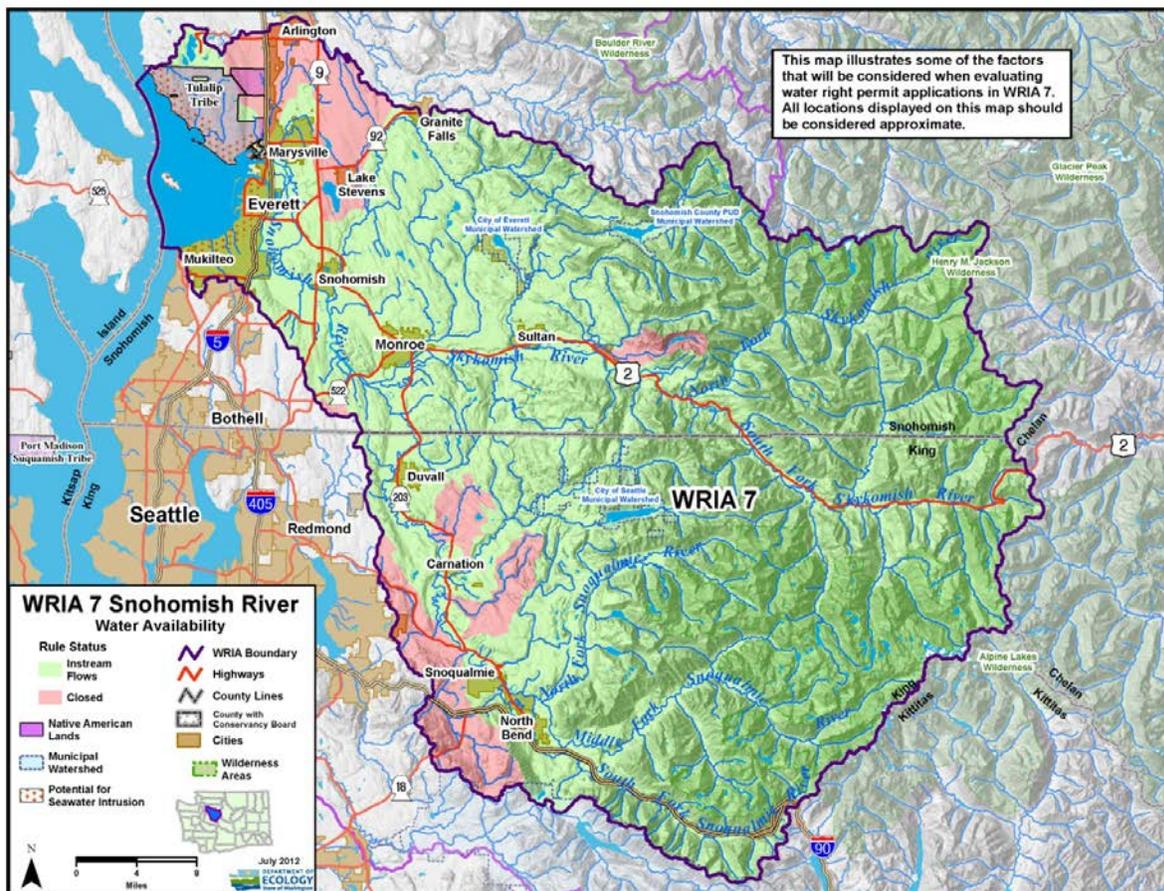
The map in this document shows some of the factors that will be considered when evaluating water right permit applications. Here are some information sources to assist you with your research:

- 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>
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- 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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