

## Lewis River Watershed, WRIA 27

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Lewis River Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users in determining the best strategies

This watershed consists of the Lewis River and numerous tributary creeks and streams. The lower Lewis Watershed is one of the most intensely farmed basins in western Washington. The annual precipitation in the Lewis Watershed ranges from 40 inches to over 150 inches per year. Most of this precipitation arrives during the winter months when overall water demands are the lowest. During the summer, snow pack 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.

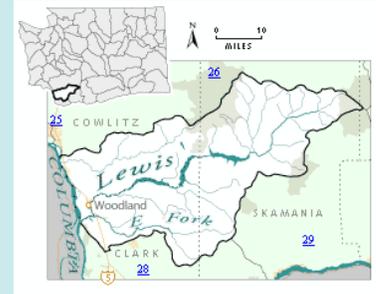
### Factors affecting water availability

There is limited water available for new uses in WRIA 27, especially given that river levels need to be maintained to ensure adequate water quality and fish migration. Additionally, PacifiCorp has senior water rights to maintain reservoir levels in Lake Merwin and Yale Lake, and as a result, much of the water in the Lewis River Watershed has already been spoken for. Increased demands from population growth, low summer and early fall streamflow levels, and impacts from climate change add to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 11, especially during the summer months.

[Chapter 173-527 WAC](#) is the instream flow rule for the Lewis River Watershed, including the Kalama, the North Fork of the Lewis River, and the East Fork of the Lewis River, and associated creeks. This rule establishes:

- Instream flows on streams (See [Chapter 173-527-060 WAC](#)).
- Closes all streams (See [Chapter 173-527-070 WAC](#)).

Reserves are established in subbasins for future domestic uses. To access these reserves for new appropriations, applicants must meet the mitigation requirements of the WRIA 27 established guidelines.



### Definitions

**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.

**Permit-exempt well:** RCW 90.44.050 allows for use of small amounts of groundwater for specific uses without going through the regular permitting process. While exempt from the permitting process, these withdrawals are still subject to all other state water laws.

**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.

For information on the mitigation requirements, contact your county permitting department.

Applicants seeking new water appropriations for other uses will likely need to mitigate for the impacts their proposed water use will have on surface water bodies.

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

Accessing municipal supplies or larger private water supply companies is the fastest and simplest option for obtaining a water supply.

All land west of Interstate 5, north of the east Fork of the Lewis River, and east of the Lewis River mainstem, and all lands west of Interstate 5, north of the Lewis River mainstem, and within the Lower Lewis subbasin are considered part of a “regional groundwater supply area” (per WAC 173-527-090) and is considered to be a location where water is potentially available on a year-round basis.

Additional options for finding a water supply include processing a water right application through the Cost Reimbursement Program. [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf). Reserves are established in the instream flow rule. Applicants may need to develop mitigation to offset the impacts of their water use to surface water if their new use is not for domestic supply. In addition the Lower Columbia mitigation guidance requirements will apply.

The groundwater permit exemption allows certain users of small quantities of ground water (most commonly single residential 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).

For more information on these and other options, refer to “Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing” <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.

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](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](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**

Ecology Southwest Regional Office  
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Lacey, WA 98503  
360-407-6300

*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*

