

Moses Coulee Watershed, WRIA 44

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

Much of central Washington is arid, receiving less than 20 inches of rain annually. Most of this 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. At the same time the demand for water for human uses, including irrigation are at the yearly maximum. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

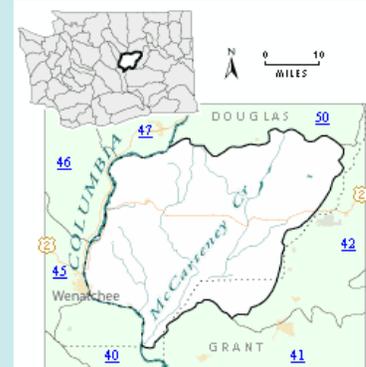
Factors affecting water availability

Much of the water in the Moses Coulee 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 Water Resource Inventory Area 44, especially during the summer months.

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 unappropriated 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.

Ecology cannot process any applications filed after December 28, 2004 for new rights to surface water or connected groundwater unless the applicant obtains a release from the Bureau of Reclamation or until the withdrawal has expired. The withdrawal may be extended, and Ecology expects BOR to request an extension before the withdrawal expires.

Applications for surface water withdrawals from the mainstem Columbia River are subject to the Instream Resource Protection Program for the Columbia River, as are any proposed groundwater



Definitions

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.

withdrawals determined to have a significant and direct impact on the Columbia River. (For more information, see <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-563>.)

The Moses Coulee-Foster Creek Watershed Planning Unit, led by local government and landowners, worked cooperatively with stakeholders as well as state and federal agencies to develop a watershed plan for WRIs 44 and 50. It contains local solutions to protect senior water rights, maintain ecosystems, and meet future water resource management objectives. The planning group also completed a detailed implementation plan in 2006 and is considering instream flow recommendations. For more information, see www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/wrias/Planning/44-50.html.

Water supply available for new uses

Surface water and groundwater availability is currently very limited throughout the basin, especially in light of the Bureau of Reclamation's withdrawal.

Information on water availability and water storage options is available in the Moses Coulee and Foster Creek Watershed Plan, at www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/wrias/Planning/44-50.html.

The Office of Columbia River (OCR) is aggressively pursuing water supply development opportunities throughout the Columbia Basin, including the Lake Roosevelt Incremental Storage Release Project, which could benefit the watershed. You may find further information on these efforts on the OCR Web Page at www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html.

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 <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/SummaryPages/1511016.html>.

Additional options for finding a water supply, including more expedited processing of new or change applications include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Processing a change application through the Douglas County or Grant County water conservancy board.
- Processing your application through the Cost Reimbursement Program. Proposing mitigation to offset the impacts to surface water will likely be required.
- Refer to 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.

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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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.

