

## Nespelem Watershed, WRIA 51

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

Many areas of eastern and central Washington are fairly arid, receiving less than 20 inches of rain annually. 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.

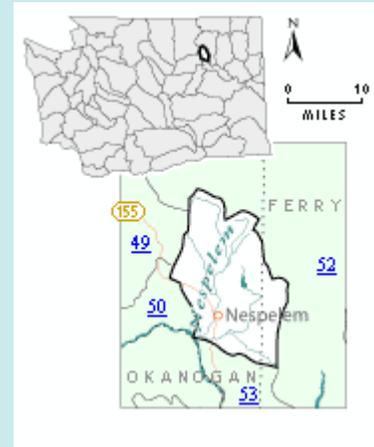
Much of the water in the Nespelem Watershed has already been spoken for. Declining groundwater levels and impacts from climate change are adding to the challenge of finding new water supplies in Water Resource Inventory Area 51, especially during the summer months.

### Factors affecting water availability

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.

The Nespelem Watershed is entirely within the boundaries of the Colville Reservation. Associated federally reserved rights are not yet quantified and so the legal availability of water in this watershed is undetermined.



### 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.

**Instream flows** are flow levels adopted into rule that create a water right for the stream to protect fish, wildlife, stockwatering, recreational uses, and other instream uses and values.

**Subbasins** are smaller drainage basins that together make up a WRIA. Subbasins are generally named for the principle creek or other surface water that runoff flows to.

A **Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA)** is one of 62 areas in Washington State designated by the Legislature and typically containing one or more river basins.

### 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.

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 basin. You may find further information on these efforts on the OCR Web Page at [www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/wrias/Planning/49.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/wrias/Planning/49.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 [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf).

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

- Connecting to an established water supplier if one is available. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Proposing mitigation to offset the impacts to surface water and groundwater.
- Processing a change application through the Okanogan County Water Conservancy Board.
- Processing your application through the Cost Reimbursement Program. Refer to [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf](http://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](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>

**Further 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.*

