

Focus on Water Availability

Salmon-Washougal Watershed, WRIA 28

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Salmon-Washougal 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 Salmon-Washougal Watershed is located in southwest Washington, and includes Salmon Creek, Washougal River and numerous tributary creeks and streams. Annual precipitation in the watershed ranges from 40 to 80 inches. 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. Little of the Salmon-Washougal Watershed benefits from snowpack so during the summer when there is little rain 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

This watershed is one of the most intensely populated basins in western Washington, and as a result much of the water in this watershed has already been spoken for. There is limited water available for new uses, especially given that river and stream levels need to be maintained to ensure adequate water quality and fish migration. Increased demands from population growth, declining summer and early fall streamflow levels, and impacts from climate change add to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 28.

Chapter 173-528 WAC is the instream flow rule for the Salmon Creek and Washougal River watershed, including: Rock Creek, Fifth Plain Creek, Lacamas Creek, Little Washougal River, West Fork of the Washougal River, and associated creeks. Additionally, Gibbons, Lawton, Duncan, Hardy, Hamilton, and Green Leaf creeks, located east of the Washougal River watershed are considered part of this watershed.



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: A plan intended to avoid impairment to existing water rights or provide offsets to surface water depletion.

Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA): one of 62 watershed areas in Washington State typically containing one or more river basins.

The instream flow rule:

- Establishes instream flows on streams (See WAC 173-528-060).
- Closes all streams (See WAC 173-528-070).
- Creates reserves for future domestic uses.

To access the reserves for new appropriations, applicants must meet mitigation requirements delineated in the WRIA 28 Guidelines: <http://www.lcfrb.gen.wa.us/Watershed%20planning%20general/Watershed.htm>

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

Water supply available for new uses

Potential water supply in the Salmon-Washougal Watershed includes municipal suppliers and private water supply companies. New individual homes may access water through a permit-exempt well for indoor use. (See RCW 90.44.050 for information on permit-exempt groundwater withdrawals.).

If an applicant is not able to connect to an existing water system or more water is needed than can be obtained from a permit-exempt well, then the water right application may be processed through the Cost Reimbursement Program. (See: 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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Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341*

