



# Frequently Asked Questions about Voluntary Regional Agreements

from Ecology's Water Resources Program

A voluntary regional agreement (VRA) is a legal agreement between the State and one or more Columbia River water users "for the purpose of providing new water for out-of-stream use, streamlining the application process, and protecting instream flow." (RCW 90.90.030). Once adopted by the Department of Ecology, a VRA serves as the framework for issuing new water rights to that individual or group of water users.

## **Q: Who can apply for a water right under a VRA?**

**A:** A water right holder or a group of water users may submit a proposal for a VRA.

## **Q: Who does Ecology have to consult with before entering a VRA?**

**A:** Ecology must consult with affected county legislative jurisdictions and watershed planning groups, federal agencies, tribal governments and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Ecology must make the results of that consultation available to the public, and then provide a 30-day public comment period before entering into a VRA.

## **Q: How are VRAs processed and prioritized? Are you in a different line than other water right decisions?**

**A:** No. There is no legal priority given to VRAs. Processing of water right applications is performed generally on a first-come, first-served basis, for a given source of water. Chapter 173-152 WAC contains the procedures and priority of work that guide the Water Resources Program when it assigns its resources to processing water right applications.

## **Q: Who makes VRA decisions? What are the criteria?**

**A:** Once a VRA is proposed, Ecology may accept the VRA following consultation and public comment. VRA agreements must ensure that, for water rights issued from the Columbia River mainstem or lower Snake River mainstem, there is no negative impact on:

- the Columbia River mainstem flows during the months of July and August and,
- the Snake River from April through August.



### **Contacts:**

**Dan Haller**  
(509) 452-4245  
dhal461@ecy.wa.gov

**Tom Tebb**  
(509) 574-3989  
gteb461@ecy.wa.gov

**On the Web:**  
<http://snipurl.com/13ozt>

**Listserv:**  
<http://snipurl.com/13p0c>

**Q: How will “no negative impact” be accomplished?**

**A:** The VRA “mitigation standard” can be achieved in many ways, including through water right acquisitions, conservation projects, and construction of new reservoir facilities.

**Q: Who pays for mitigation projects under a VRA?**

**A:** The State is currently developing funding criteria for projects to be funded with the \$200-million-dollar Columbia River Account. Cost-shares for projects will be clarified in late 2007. Every VRA is unique and any individual VRA entered into by Ecology does not form a precedent for future VRAs.

**Q: How long does a VRA program last?**

**A:** The VRA section in the legislation expires on June 30, 2012, but VRAs entered into by Ecology before that date can extend indefinitely.

**Q: What other ways are there to get a new water right?**

**A:** Applications can be processed using the existing process. The VRA program is simply another option. More information about water rights is available at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/water-right-home.html>.

**Q: Where can I find additional information?**

**A:** Information on the Columbia River Water Management Project, including VRAs, can be accessed through Ecology’s Web site. The address is: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html>.

*If you need this publication in an alternate format, please call the Columbia River Unit at 509-575-2490. Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.*