

Voluntary Regional Agreement:

Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association and the Department of Ecology

The Department of Ecology (Ecology) and the Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association (CSRIA) are proposing a Voluntary Regional Agreement (VRA, also known as the agreement) as provided for in [RCW 90.90.030](#).

The purpose of the agreement is to provide new water for issuing drought permits allowing water use in low-water years to existing interruptible water rights holders and new water rights from the Columbia and Snake Rivers. The agreement also directs that the new permits and water rights cannot reduce current Columbia River stream flows during July and August, or Snake River flows from April through August. Under the agreement, new summer diversions will be offset by water that is conserved, stored, or purchased by Ecology.

Issuing Drought Permits under the Voluntary Regional Agreement

Under the agreement, applicants would receive drought permits in exchange for:

- Certifying their use of best management practices to conserve water.
- Recalibrating their water rights (recalibrating means auditing a water right to identify water savings and modifying the water right accordingly).
- Enrolling any saved water into the state's trust water program to benefit flows.

Ecology would begin issuing drought permits as soon as water that offsets new uses becomes available.

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Additional information about this VRA and other Columbia River Basin Water Management Program activities is available at our web site, <http://www.ecy.wa.gov>.

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Issuing New Water Rights Under the Voluntary Regional Agreement

Issuing new water rights under the agreement will occur in two phases. In the first phase, CSRIA and Ecology will fund three conservation projects as a pilot to measure water savings. If enough water is saved, new water rights will be issued in the second phase based on the savings.

Applicants would receive water rights in exchange for:

- Meeting the same measures required for drought permits.
- Paying an annual fee of \$10 per acre-foot (adjusted for inflation).

The first pilot phase of the agreement is expected to be completed in December 2010, or as late as June 2012. The second (new water rights) phase will begin at the end of phase one.

Ecology will make a good faith effort to provide the water needed to offset drought permits and new water rights. CSRIA will support this effort. The water to offset these new uses must be secured by the time the new use begins.