

# Focus on: Water Supply Development Funding



## WHY IT MATTERS

Long-term water supply development funding is needed to counter the impacts of climate change, aging infrastructure and delivering integrated water solutions. Bonding authority is a proven strategy that has worked for developing sustainable water supplies that take multiple biennia to complete. There is decades more work to embark on to protect and enhance the Columbia River Basin's communities, rural economies and the natural environment.

### Contact information

Tom Tebb, Director  
Office of Columbia River  
(509) 574-3989  
Thomas.Tebb@ecy.wa.gov

Melissa Downes, Policy Lead  
Office of Columbia River  
(509) 454-4259  
Melissa.Downes@ecy.wa.gov

## Proposed Legislation

In 2006, the legislature allocated \$200 million dollars in dedicated bond authority to the Department of Ecology (Ecology) for water supply development. That bond authority will be exhausted at the end of the 2017-2019 biennium. The proposal reauthorizes up to \$300 million in dedicated tax exempt and taxable bond authority as continued investment in the development of new water supplies in the Columbia River Basin.

## The problem

Ecology's Office of Columbia River (OCR) has been providing innovative and cost effective water supply solutions in eastern Washington, making more than 413,845 acre-feet of new water supplies available since 2006. However there is more work to be done to ensure long term, sustainable water infrastructure and supplies. Large-scale water supply development projects often require more than one biennium to complete. The OCR bond authority will end in 2019, and without additional bond authority, projects will cost more and take longer to achieve. Other funding models – 'pay-as-you-go', and biennial cash funds in the capital budget will make it difficult, or impossible, to split large-scale projects into multiple phases.

Careful stewardship of the \$200 million bonding capacity for the first 12 years of the program provided stability and continuity that led to the stated success so far. Continued funding to meet the water needs for the next 10 to 20 years is the most prudent and cost effective approach for long-term planning, securing joint and partnership funding.



Figure 1 Building infrastructure like this siphon brings 164,000 ac-ft of surface water for irrigation to replace water from a declining aquifer in the Odessa sub-area, one of the most productive agricultural regions in the country.



Figure 2 The Office of Columbia River secured an additional 132,000 ac-ft of water from Lake Roosevelt for communities, fish, agriculture, and drought relief.



Figure 3 Fish passage, streamflow enhancement, and habitat improvement projects improve fisheries and help endangered species like this bull trout. Photo credit: Eric Anderson WDFW.

## The solution

Providing additional dedicated bonding authority to Ecology will allow the Office of Columbia River to continue to build innovative partnerships and deliver integrated water solutions by developing sustainable water supplies for eastern Washington communities, rural economies and the natural environment.

## Ecology's proposal

Ecology requests that the Legislature add new sections to Chapter 43.99G RCW to authorize a second dedicated general bond authorization up to \$300 million beginning with the 2019 – 2021 biennium.

## How it will work

Up to \$300 million of bonding authority will be granted to Ecology to develop water supplies over multiple biennia. Expenditures will be subject to legislative approval.

## How it will benefit Washington

Eastern Washington is home to approximately one-fourth of the state's population, one of the largest agricultural economies in the United States, and a natural environment dependent on adequate streamflows. Climate change and aging infrastructure in what is already an arid region, pose a threat to a large portion of the state's communities, environment, and economy. Additionally, continued dedicated bond authorization provides continuity for continued investment in developing reliable, sustainable, water supply benefits for eastern Washington, along with reducing the risk of water disputes, failing infrastructure and costly litigation.

## Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodation including materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 509-454-4241 or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. People with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. People with speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.