

## Focus on: Skagit Basin's Big Lake Water Bank



### What is water banking?

Water banking is a process for transferring existing water rights to new uses. Generally well-established “senior” water rights are purchased and put into the water bank. The water rights are then made available for people to make “withdrawals” as mitigation credits. Typically no water is actually moved around. The mitigation water is instead left in the river to offset the impact of new water uses.

Visit our [Skagit River basin web page](#) for more information.

<https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Protecting-stream-flows/Instream-flow-implementation/Skagit-River-basin-projects/Developing-solutions>

### Finding Water Supply Solutions

The Department of Ecology (Ecology) is pursuing solutions for landowners in the Skagit River Basin without a legal water supply due to the adoption of Chapter 173-503 WAC and the Swinomish v. Ecology State Supreme Court decision. (See sidebar for a link to more information.)

The Big Lake Water Bank is good news for the Skagit River basin. The water bank is a mitigation program that provides a legal and reliable year-round water supply for homes within the Nookachamps subbasin while also protecting streamflows.

The mitigation water is free to eligible water users in the mitigation area. Ecology purchased this mitigation water with a legislative appropriation aimed at finding water supply solutions in the Skagit watershed. The Big Lake Mitigation Plan outlines how and where the water can be used.

This water bank will benefit:

- Existing landowners within the mitigation area who did not have a legal year-round water supply since the Supreme Court ruling.
- Up to 78 landowners on currently undeveloped lots within the mitigation area.

This water bank is the result of our long-term work with partners in the basin and is part of Ecology’s ongoing work in the Skagit basin. Ecology is committed to finding solutions that protect water for people, farms, and fish now and into the future.

Contact information

John Rose  
 Water Resources Program  
 425-649-7230  
[john.rose@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:john.rose@ecy.wa.gov)

Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodation including materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 360-407-6872 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.

**How is the water bank managed?**

Ecology and Skagit County will jointly manage the water bank. The county is the lead and integrates the mitigation program into their building permitting processes. Ecology is responsible for water bank accounting and provides technical assistance to the county, as requested.

Skagit County will issue a “Proof of Mitigated Water Supply” document to eligible new users. This document is recorded with the property title and confirms the legal water availability for a domestic unit.

**Are there water use limitations?**

Each new home is allocated 175 gallons per day (gpd) for indoor domestic purposes and 143 gpd for outdoor irrigation, enough to irrigate about 75 square feet of lawn. These quantities are informed by average indoor and outdoor use within the basin. The actual amount debited from the water bank will depend on whether the home is on septic or sewer.

**How will water use be tracked?**

All new building permit applicants who receive mitigation water are required to purchase and install a remote read metering system. Ecology will collect and manage the water-use data. Existing homes will not be required to meter.

Ecology’s objective is to balance the water bank as a whole instead of enforcing at an individual level. However, we may take steps if we determine someone is willfully and significantly exceeding their water allocation.

**What else has Ecology been doing in the Skagit basin?**

The Big Lake Water Bank plan is part of Ecology’s continuing work to find water solutions in the Skagit basin. For example, in 2017, Ecology identified a new water availability zone – an area near Bayview where groundwater drains to saltwater and withdrawals have no effect on the Skagit River. Ecology is also pursuing the purchase of other senior water rights to provide additional mitigation in the Skagit watershed.

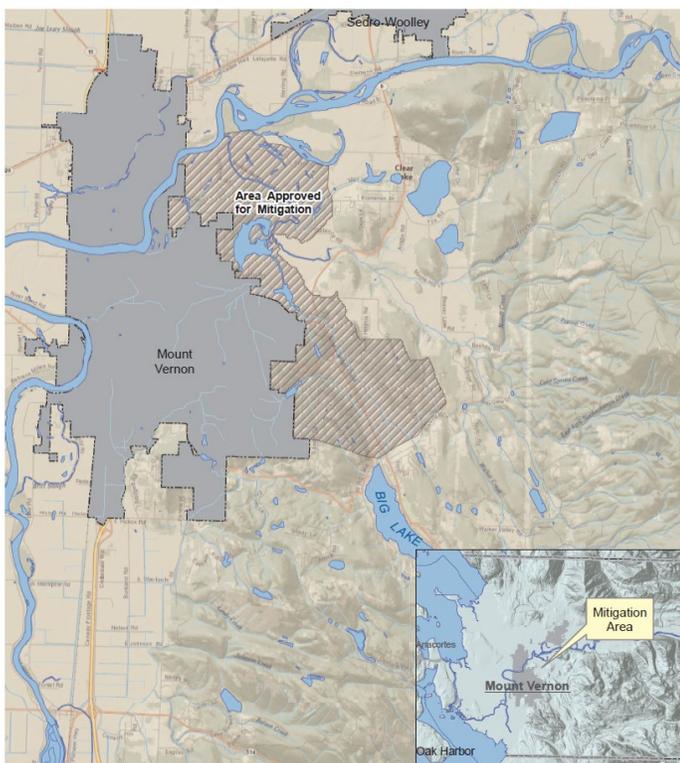


Figure 1 Big Lake mitigation area