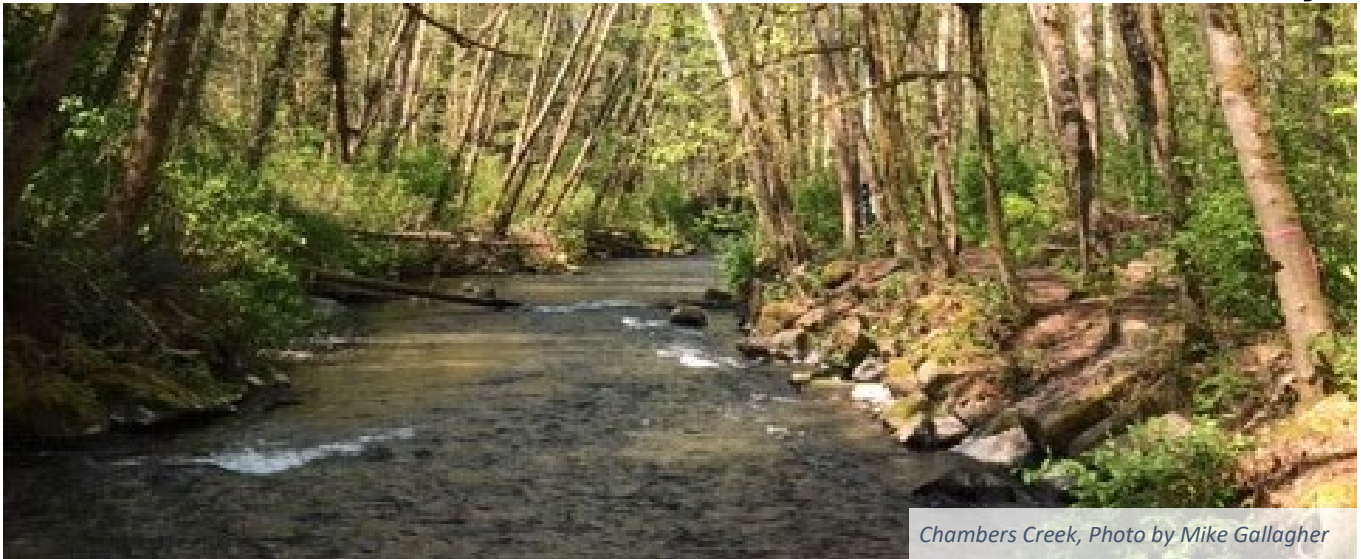


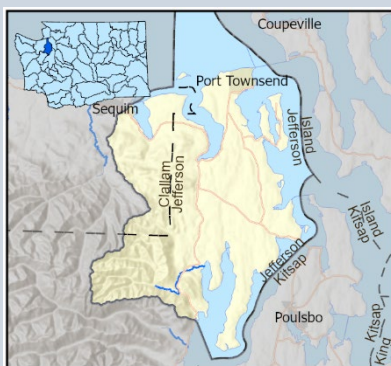
WRIA 17 Quilcene-Snow Watershed Water Availability



Chambers Creek, Photo by Mike Gallagher

Overview

- Introduction to WRIA 17
- Water Availability Factors
- Options for Acquiring Water
- Resources
- Map



What is a watershed?
Washington is divided into 62 major watersheds or Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs), which are areas that each capture precipitation and funnel rain and snowmelt through smaller subbasins into streams, tributaries, and rivers and typically drain to marine waters or the Columbia River.

Introduction to WRIA 17

The Quilcene-Snow Watershed or Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 17 is defined as the area that drains to the Big Quilcene River, the Little Quilcene River, and Snow Creek, but also includes various smaller creeks on the Quimper and Toandos peninsulas and in the Chimacum Valley area. It is located in northwest Washington, on the Olympic Peninsula, at the mouth of Puget Sound, in the rain shadow of the Olympic Mountains.

How can I get water?

Depending on your proposal, you may have more than one option to acquire a reliable water supply:

- Connecting to an existing water system is usually the fastest and easiest option if your project is within the system’s service area.
- Using a permit-exempt well if you meet the limits under state law.
- Purchasing an existing water right and transferring it to the new use.
- Applying for a new water right, which may need mitigation.



See the *Options for Acquiring Water* section for more information about water right permit options and when to meet with Ecology staff.

Washington Water Law Waters of the state belong to the public and can't be owned by any one individual or group. Water right holders have the right to USE water, from a set source, for a particular purpose, in a specific location.

The Department of Ecology is responsible for managing the water resources of the state, including issuing the right to use water as well as protecting the instream resources for the benefit of the public.

Washington water law is based on the “prior appropriation” system, often called “first in time, first in right.” New water rights may not harm older water rights. Applications for water from the same source must be processed in the order they are received, although there are certain exceptions.

Applicable Laws and Regulations

- [RCW 90.03](#): Washington Water Code
- [RCW 90.44](#): Regulation of Public Groundwaters
- [RCW 90.54](#): Water Resources Act of 1971
- [WAC 173-517](#): The Instream Flow Rule for WRIA 17

Water Availability Factors

Due to Washington’s varied land uses, terrain, and precipitation levels, water availability for new water right permits varies dramatically across the state. In the Quilcene-Snow Watershed, key factors affecting water availability include:

- Existing water rights.
- Precipitation.
- Instream flow rule.
- Tribal interests.
- Seawater intrusion.

Existing water rights

Water rights have been issued in the Quilcene-Snow Watershed for over 100 years, and as a result most water in the watershed is already legally spoken for or “appropriated.”

Precipitation

Although annual precipitation ranges from 15 to 30 inches per year, most of this precipitation arrives during the winter months when water demands are the lowest. Only a fraction becomes groundwater available for human and economic uses. Little of the Quilcene-Snow 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.

Instream flow rule

Instream flow rules are an element of water and river management that help maintain healthy ecosystems that support fish, communities, and economies. WRIA 17 has an instream flow rule (WAC 173-517), adopted to preserve the uses and values of individual rivers and streams.

The instream flow rule:

- Protects the river from new permitted water rights by setting minimum flow levels, which are like water rights for the stream. Instream flows do not put water in the streams and do not affect existing (senior) water rights.

- Creates year-round or seasonal closures for some streams, protecting existing flows from new appropriations.

WAC 173-517 set instream flows for the Big Quilcene River, Little Quilcene River, Snow, Chimacum, Salmon, Ludlow, Thorndyke, Tarboo, Donovan, Leland, Howe, Piddling, and Spencer creeks, and closed or seasonally closed the same subbasins to new uses.

The rule also established reserves of water for future use in these subbasins with specific conditions of use:

- Restricting any permit-exempt groundwater use in several subbasins to a conservation standard of no more than 500 gallons per day.
- Limiting use of the reserve in Chimacum subbasin to domestic (indoor) use only.
- Allowing some expanded use of the groundwater exemption for commercial agriculture in three subbasins.
- Allowing processing of new water rights for municipal, agricultural, or industrial uses in three subbasins.

Tribal interests

The Jamestown S’Klallam, Port Gamble S’Klallam, Lower Elwha Klallam, and Skokomish Indian Tribes are very concerned about maintaining flows and fish habitat in the watershed and water right applications and mitigation plans are routinely sent to the Tribes for their review.

Seawater intrusion

The movement of saltwater into freshwater aquifers, known as seawater intrusion, is a concern for coastal areas of Puget Sound. Any groundwater withdrawals located in the coastal areas are evaluated for the risk of seawater intrusion into existing fresh groundwater supplies.

Summary

Increasing demands for water over time, from ongoing population growth, agriculture, and other consumptive uses as well as associated land use practices, have resulted in lower streamflows and declining groundwater levels in some areas. These decreases have impacted important resources for fisheries and general stream health. The impacts of climate change in WRIA 17 are also yet to be fully realized. However, it is apparent that water availability is limited throughout the Quilcene-Snow Watershed.



Options for Acquiring Water

There is water set aside in reserves for future uses in this watershed. The reserves in three subbasins make some water available for new water rights. In the remaining eight subbasins, water is reserved for permit-exempt groundwater uses only.

Permit-exempt options

In most of WRIA 17, permit-exempt groundwater withdrawals are regulated under both RCW 90.44.050 and WAC 173-517, and additional requirements will apply, including metering of any new permit-exempt well use. (Exceptions are described later.) For metering requirements see [Water Metering Specifications for the Quilcene-Snow Watershed](#).

This section provides information on the purposes and quantities of water that may be available through the permit exemption, if an alternative water supply is not accessible.

Where sufficient reserve water is available, **outside the Chimacum subbasin**, the following groundwater uses exempt from the water right permitting process are allowed:

- A permit-exempt well serving an individual user not exceeding a maximum of 500 gpd or an annual average more than 350 gpd, for all permit-exempt uses authorized under RCW 90.44.050, which include:
 - Domestic use,
 - Irrigation of no more than ½ acre of noncommercial lawn and garden,
 - Industrial purposes (such as for a store, restaurant, small industrial facility, or commercial farm irrigation), and/or
 - Stockwater to provide drinking water for stock animals.
- A well serving a group domestic system not exceeding:
 - Maximum use of 500 gpd by each residence,
 - An annual average of 350 gpd by each residence,
 - One-half acre of noncommercial irrigation for the group, and
 - Total use of 5,000 gpd for the group.
- An individual use greater than 500 gpd (including an individual use that is part of a group domestic system), which is addressed by implementing an approved mitigation plan as described in WAC 173-517-030(12) and the total use from the well(s) does not exceed 5,000 gpd.

The following permit-exempt groundwater uses are allowed in the identified subbasins when sufficient reserve water is available:

- **Chimacum** subbasin: indoor domestic use only, not exceeding 500 gpd, or an annual average of 350 gpd per residence.
- **Big Quilcene** and **Salmon Creek** subbasins: up to 5,000 gpd for commercial irrigation.
- **Snow Creek** subbasin: up to 3,000 gpd for commercial irrigation.

WAC 173-517 does not regulate portions of the watershed, as shown in the map on page 8, including: Chicken Coop Creek subbasin, Dean Creek subbasin, JimmyComeLately Creek subbasin, Johnson Creek subbasin, West Sequim Bay subbasin, and the portion of Miller Peninsula in Clallam County. In these areas, as well as designated **Coastal management areas**, and any other areas shown where withdrawals will not adversely affect surface water, all permit-exempt groundwater uses under WAC 90.44.050 are allowed:

- Single or group domestic use not exceeding 5,000 gpd,
- Irrigation of noncommercial lawn and garden not exceeding ½ acre,
- Industrial purposes, including commercial irrigation, not exceeding 5,000 gpd, and
- Stockwatering.

Permit options

If your project cannot access water from an existing water purveyor and doesn't qualify for use of a permit-exempt well, you will need to:

- Apply for and receive a new water right, or
- Buy an existing water right and change or transfer it to the new use.



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. See the *Resources* section for links to forms and other information.

New water right

Although little water is available for new water rights in WRIA 17, WAC 173-517 does allow limited new permitted uses from the reserves in three subbasins. Based on a public interest evaluation that considers water availability for future domestic use in the subbasin, the **Big Quilcene**, **Little Quilcene** (including Leland and Howe creeks), and **Thorndyke** subbasins may have reserve water available for water right permits for:

- Municipal or community domestic water supply with domestic hookups consistent with the conservation standard defined in WAC 173-517-120.
- Agricultural irrigation.
- Industrial use.

Attempting to acquire new water rights within other areas regulated with either instream flows or closures will likely be a very difficult and expensive process. It requires the hiring of qualified professionals and submitting a comprehensive mitigation and monitoring plan. This may also be necessary in areas of the watershed not regulated by instream flows. Even then you are not guaranteed approval of a water right. Projects proposing non-consumptive uses of water may be approvable in both closed areas and areas with instream flow regulations.

Change or transfer of an existing water right

It can be easier to buy an existing water right and change the purpose and/or place of use. Changing either of these aspects of a water right can be challenging if the change creates a new or different impact on a stream. It is important that the water right be in good standing by regular use over its lifetime.

Mitigation refers to measures taken to prevent any impact on streamflow during the period that water is not available, by either:

- Halting the diversion or withdrawal, or
- Replacing the water taken—in time and in-place.

A common form of mitigation is to retire an existing water right upstream from the new use.

Processing options

The wait for your water right application to be processed can be years. An option to speed up the process:

- Submit your new or change water right application through the [Cost Reimbursement Program](#).

For more information on this and other options, refer to [Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing](#).

You can discuss all of your options to supply water to your project at your pre-application consultation with Ecology. To schedule, submit the [pre-application consultation form](#).

ADA accommodations

The Department of Ecology is committed to providing people with disabilities access to information and services by meeting or exceeding the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Washington State Policy #188.

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6872, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

Resources

Contact Information

Ecology Southwest Region Office
300 Desmond Drive SE
Lacey, WA 98503
PO Box 47775
Olympia WA 98504-7775
Phone: 360-407-6300

More Information

Visit our website for the most current information.
ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply

Publications and forms are searchable in the
online database.

ecology.wa.gov/publications



Forms

- [Water Right Pre-Application Consultation form](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/ecy070440.html), Form ECY 070-440
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/ecy070440.html>
- [Application for a New Water Right](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/ecy040114.html), Form ECY 040-114
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/ecy040114.html>
- [Application to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/ecy040197.html), Form ECY 040-197
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/ecy040197.html>

Publications

- [Water Metering Specifications for the Quilcene-Snow Watershed](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1011011.html), Publication 10-11-011
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1011011.html>
- [Changes to Water Use \(for new homes\) in the Quilcene-Snow Watershed](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1011008.html),
Publication 10-11-008,
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1011008.html>
- [FAQ: What Agricultural Water Users Need to Know about Water for New Farms in the Quilcene-Snow Watershed](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1011009.html), Publication 10-11-009
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1011009.html>
- [Cost Reimbursement Program](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2211022.html), Publication 22-11-022
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2211022.html>
- [Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/1111067.html), Publication 11-11-067
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/1111067.html>
- Focus on: [The Groundwater Permit Exemption](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1911090.html), Publication 19-11-090
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1911090.html>

Website – ecology.wa.gov

- Visit the [water rights permits page](https://ecology.wa.gov/WaterRightPermits) for more information and helpful links.
<https://ecology.wa.gov/WaterRightPermits>
- Use the [Water Rights Search](https://ecology.wa.gov/WaterRightsSearch) to locate and research water rights on land parcels
anywhere in the state. <https://ecology.wa.gov/WaterRightsSearch>

Map

