

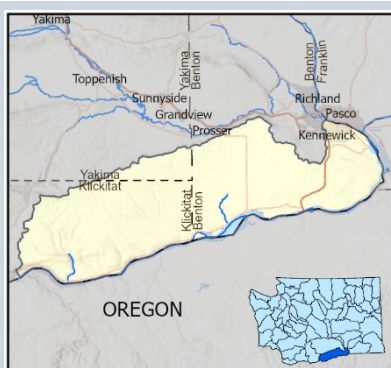
WRIA 31 Rock-Glade Watershed Water Availability



Rock Creek in Klickitat County. Photo by Heather Simmons.

Overview

- Introduction to WRIA 31
- 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 31

The Rock-Glade Watershed or Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 31 drains to the Columbia River and includes Rock Creek, Glade Creek, and other smaller seasonal streams. It is located in south-central Washington, primarily in eastern Klickitat County and south Benton County.

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

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 Rock-Glade Watershed, key factors affecting water availability include:

- Precipitation
- Existing water rights
- Instream flow rules
- Potential new supplies

Refer to the map at the end of the document.



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 waters of the state, including issuing the right to use water as well as protecting 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 173-531](#): The Instream Flow Rule for the main stem Columbia River

Precipitation

Most streams in the watershed are dry much of the year and thus surface water is physically very limited. The availability of groundwater within the basin is also extremely limited due to its close connection to surface water sources.

The climate of the Rock-Glade Watershed is primarily influenced by marine air masses traveling eastward over the Cascades and along the Columbia River. This results in more precipitation in the higher elevations (up to 24 inches in the northwest portion) that decreases from west to east (as low as 8 inches). The majority of precipitation occurs between October and April, some occurring as snow, particularly at higher elevations.

During the summer, the snowpack is gone, there is little rain, and naturally low streamflows are dependent on groundwater inflow. At the same time, the demand for human uses, including irrigation, are at the yearly maximum. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

Existing water rights

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

Instream flow rules

Instream flow rules are an element of water and river management that help maintain healthy ecosystems that support fish, communities, and economies. The Rock Glade Basin drains into the Columbia River, which has an instream flow rule

([WAC 173-563](#)¹). Instream flow rules are 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.

Potential new supplies

Ecology's Office of Columbia River (OCR) is pursuing new water supply opportunities throughout the Columbia Basin. OCR implements a range of water development projects and programs that provide secure and reliable water supplies. For up to date information on available water supplies developed through OCR, refer to [Eastern Washington water projects](#)².

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 31 are also yet to be fully realized. However, it is apparent that water availability is limited throughout the Rock-Glade Watershed.

Options for Acquiring Water

Permit-exempt options

State law, [RCW 90.44.050](#)³, exempts the following groundwater uses from the water right permitting process:

- Single or group domestic uses, not exceeding 5,000 gallons per day (gpd).
- Irrigation of up to a half-acre of non-commercial lawn or garden.
- Industrial purposes (such as water for a store, restaurant, or small industrial facility, or irrigation of a small commercial farm), not exceeding 5,000 gpd.
- Stockwater to provide drinking water for stock animals. Other stock-related purposes (such as washdown of a milking parlor or irrigation for growing hay for stock animals) may require a water right permit.

A project proposal is also limited to the use of one exemption for each type of use. For example, a project may consist of a subdivision that includes multiple homes that use multiple wells. The entire subdivision (one project) may not withdraw more than 5,000 gpd for domestic use. Similarly, the

¹ <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-563>

² <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Water-supply-projects-EW>

³ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=90.44.050>

project may irrigate up to a half-acre of lawn or non-commercial garden, but that is the limit for the entire subdivision, even if there is more than one well. For more information on groundwater use exemptions, see *Publications*.

There is no exemption from permitting for surface water diversions.

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
- Acquire an existing water right and apply for **and receive** a change or transfer for the new use, a new point of withdrawal or diversion, or a new place of use (or a combination of these). This option could be subject to limitations. Having a pre-application consultation will help identify the feasibility of your application.



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 *Resources* for links to forms and other information.

New water right

Attempting to acquire new water rights within areas regulated with either instream flows or closures will likely be a very difficult and expensive process that may:

- Involve the hiring of qualified professionals and submitting a comprehensive mitigation and monitoring plan.
- Require mitigation to address, in-time and in-place, the impact of the water withdrawal or diversion on instream flows or other senior water rights.

This does not guarantee 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 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.

Water acquisition options include the use of [water banking](#)⁴. It is an institutional tool, used to facilitate the legal transfer and market exchange of various types of surface, groundwater, and storage

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.

⁴ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Water-rights/Water-banks>

entitlements. Water banks can provide senior water rights for use in mitigating the impacts on the water source from a new use.

Processing options

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

- Submit your new or change water right application through the [Cost Reimbursement Program](#)⁵. Due to workload and staffing limits, we may not be able to accept your application into the Cost Reimbursement Program. We strongly recommend first requesting a pre-application consultation.
- Process your change application through your local [Water Conservancy Board](#)⁶.

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

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](#).⁷

⁵ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Water-rights/Cost-reimbursement>

⁶ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Water-rights/Water-conservancy-boards>

⁷ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/ecy070440.html>

Resources

Contact Information

Ecology Central Regional Office
1250 West Alder Street
Union Gap, WA 98903-0009
Phone: 509-575-2490

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

- [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>
- Learn more about the work being done by our [Office of the Columbia River](https://ecology.wa.gov/About-us/Get-to-know-us/Our-Programs/Office-of-Columbia-River).
<https://ecology.wa.gov/About-us/Get-to-know-us/Our-Programs/Office-of-Columbia-River>

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.

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



Map

