

# WRIA 58 Middle Lake Roosevelt Watershed Water Availability



Gifford-Inchelium Ferry; Photo by dervish, <https://flic.kr/p/5bZbpZ>

## Overview

- Introduction to WRIA 58
- Water Availability Factors
- Options for Acquiring Water
- Resources
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### 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 58

The Middle Lake Roosevelt Watershed or Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 58 is defined as the area that drains to Lake Roosevelt upstream of the mouth of the Spokane River and downstream of the mouth of the Colville River. Lake Roosevelt is a reservoir of the Columbia River created by Grand Coulee Dam. It is located in northeast Washington, in an eastern portion of Ferry County and a western portion of Stevens 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 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.

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
- [RCW 77.57](#): Fishways, Flow, and Screening

## 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 Middle Lake Roosevelt Watershed, key factors affecting water availability include:

- Climate and geology.
- Source limitations.
- Existing water rights.
- Tribal interests.

### Climate and geology

The annual precipitation in the Middle Lake Roosevelt Watershed ranges from 10 inches per year near the mouth of the Spokane River to 30 inches in the higher elevations. Only a fraction of this precipitation becomes groundwater available for human and economic uses. In general, availability and yield of groundwater from bedrock in this WRIA is very limited by climate and geology.

Most of the precipitation arrives during the winter months, when water demands are the lowest. During the summer, the snowpack is gone, there is little rain, and 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.

### Source limitations

This watershed has administrative restrictions known as Surface Water Source Limitations (SWSLs), which limit most water sources in the watershed. This determination comes from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife that flows be protected to maintain fish populations.

### Tribal interests

The reservation for the Spokane Tribe and the Colville Confederated Tribes make up much of the lands located within WRIA 58. The tribes are concerned about maintaining flows and fish habitat in the watershed and water right applications and mitigation plans are routinely sent to them for their review. Federally Reserved Rights are not quantified at this time and thus the legal availability of water in these areas is undetermined.

### Existing water rights

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

Numerous adjudications have taken place in the basin. Prior adjudications are an indication that most, if not all, of the available water has already been allocated. Adjudicated tributary subbasins include: Alder Creek, Corus Creek, Cheweka Creek, Harvey Creek, Jennings Creek, Magee Creek, O-Ra-Pak-En Creek, Quillisascut Creek, and Stranger Creek.

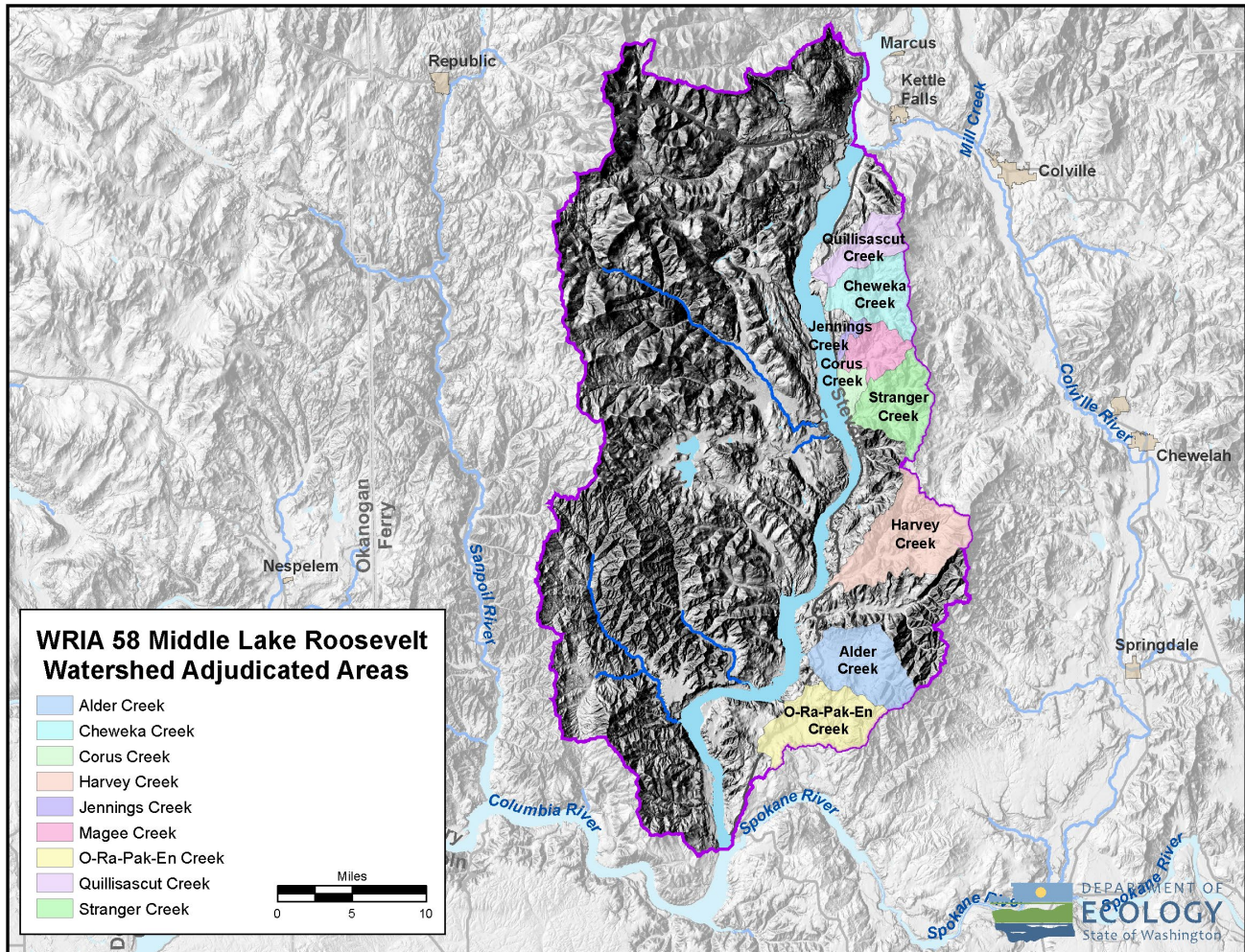


Figure 1 There are 9 adjudicated areas in WRIA 58.

### Potential new supplies

Charged with the aggressive pursuit of new water supplies for the Columbia River Basin, Ecology’s Office of Columbia River (OCR) implements a range of water development projects and programs that provide secure and reliable water supplies. Water for new appropriations may be possible from the Lake Roosevelt or Sullivan Lake projects. For up to date information on available water supplies developed through OCR, refer to [Eastern Washington water projects](#).

## 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 58 are also yet to be fully realized. However, it is apparent that water availability is limited throughout the Middle Lake Roosevelt Watershed.



## Options for Acquiring Water

### Permit-exempt options

State law, RCW 90.44.050, 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, so a housing subdivision, for example, cannot use a series of wells to exceed the 5,000 gpd limit or the half-acre of non-commercial lawn and garden. The entire subdivision, collectively, cannot exceed either limitation.

The permit exemption may not be available to prospective water users in certain areas that have been closed to further appropriation because there is limited or no water available. Check with Ecology staff at the regional office for more information.

There is no exemption from permitting for surface water diversions. This includes development of springs for any purpose of use.

### 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 do the following prior to any development:

- Apply for **and receive** a new water right permit, or
- Acquire an existing water right and apply for **and receive** a change or transfer for the new use, new point of withdrawal/diversion, and/or new place of 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

Attempting to acquire new water rights within 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 does not guarantee approval of a water right. Mitigation can be any action or group of actions that offset the impact of the water withdrawal or diversion on instream flows or other senior water rights.

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. Please consider consulting with your regional Ecology staff prior to purchasing an existing right to discuss any potential risks.

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 buy and retire an existing water right upstream from the new use.

## Resources

### Contact Information

Ecology Eastern Regional Office  
4601 North Monroe Street  
Spokane, WA 99205-1295  
Phone: 509-329-3400

### More Information

Visit our website for the most current information.  
[ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply](https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply)

Publications and forms are searchable in the online database.  
[ecology.wa.gov/publications](https://ecology.wa.gov/publications)

## Forms

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

## Publications

- [Cost Reimbursement Program](#), Publication 22-11-022  
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2211022.html>
- [Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing](#), Publication 11-11-067  
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/1111067.html>
- Focus on: [The Groundwater Permit Exemption](#), Publication 19-11-090  
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1911090.html>

## Website – [ecology.wa.gov](https://ecology.wa.gov)

- Visit the [water rights permits page](#) for more information and helpful links.  
<https://ecology.wa.gov/WaterRightPermits>
- Use [Water Rights Search](#) 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 Columbia River](#).  
<https://ecology.wa.gov/OCR>

### 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.

# Map

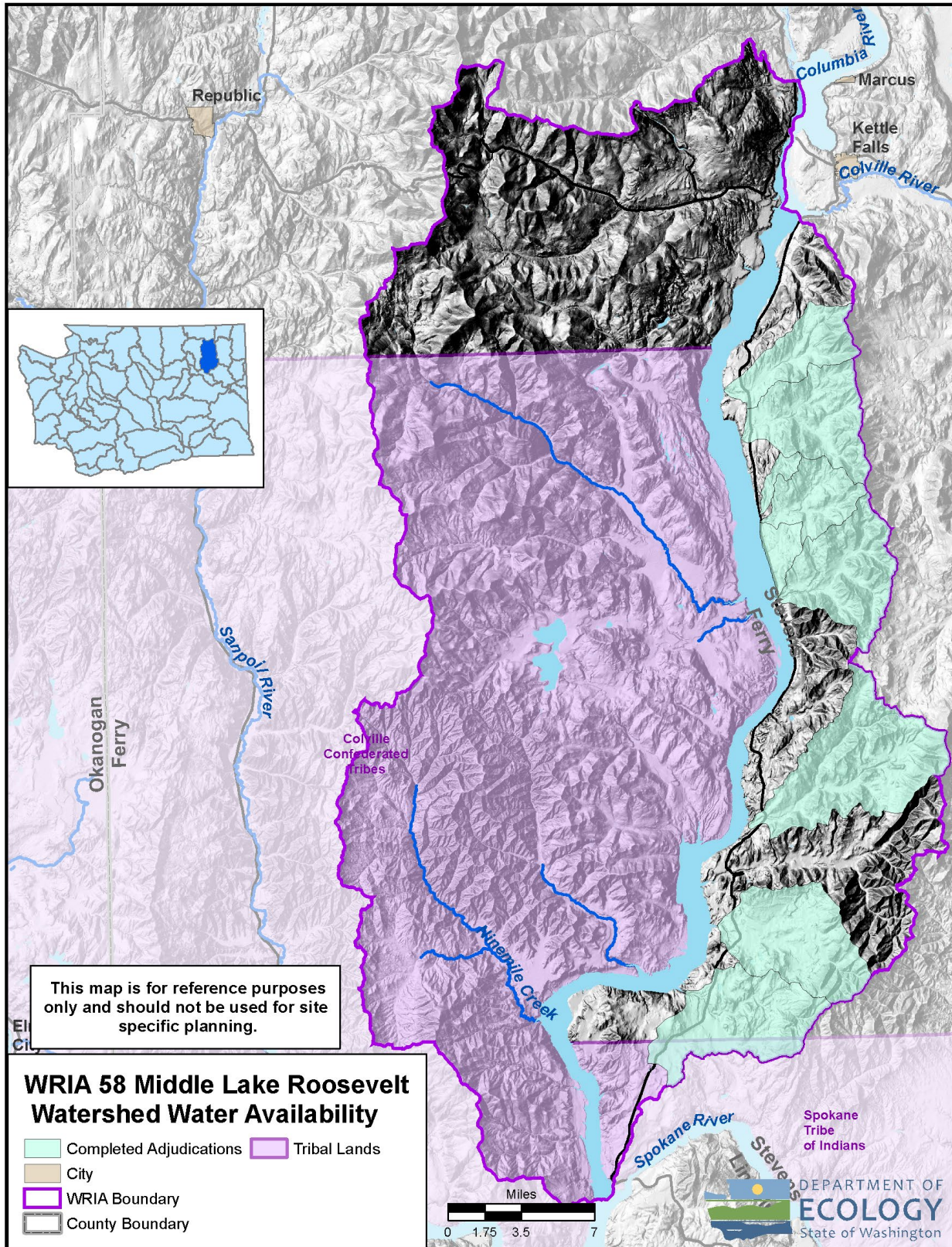


Figure 2 WRIA 58 Middle Lake Roosevelt Watershed Water Availability.