

Adjudication and Your Home

What is adjudication?

Adjudication is a legal process in Whatcom County Superior Court between the Department of Ecology and all local water users. Its purpose is to quantify and prioritize water rights, giving the highest priority to the oldest, continuous uses. It does not involve criminal proceedings or penalties and does not change the current law on water use.

I use a private well for water at home. Do I need to fill out a court claim form?

Yes. If you own land with a well in WRIA 1, this adjudication affects you. In the court claim form, you will need to describe your past and current water use. For most homeowners, this will be a simple process of reporting the date of first use and the location of your home and well.

Groundwater permit-

exemption: Most water uses require a permit from Ecology, but some groundwater uses are **exempt**. This exemption allows up to 5,000 gallons per day and covers up to ½ acre of lawn and garden. While a permit isn't required, other laws still apply.

I'm ready to file. What do I do?

If you don't already have a court claim form, you can pick one up at our Bellingham Field Office: 913 Squalicum Way #101, Bellingham, WA 98225. Read the form and instructions carefully. The court claim form is best filled out online using [Whatcom County Superior Court's Guide and File](#) system. We suggest using Chrome, Edge or Firefox. Safari is not recommended. The Whatcom County Superior Court Clerk is required by law to charge you \$25 for filing, with an additional service fee of \$1 for the online service.

The court claim form is divided into four parts. Everyone will complete Part A (Claimant names) and Part D (signatures). Then, based on your water use you will choose whether to complete Part B, Part C, or both. Contact Ecology if you have concerns or questions about which sections you should fill out.

Part B: Small-scale water usage

Part B is the simplified part of the form designed for small-scale home groundwater use. It has fewer questions, so it is easier to read and quicker to complete. Use Part B to report your "domestic" water use, which includes daily household activities such as drinking, cooking, water for pets, sanitary purposes, and other incidental uses. Part B is for homes that use no more than 500 gallons per day (gpd) for indoor domestic use (less than the full 5,000 gpd under the permit exemption but more typical) and irrigating less than ½ acre of lawn and garden.



Part C: More detailed questions for more complex uses

Part C is for larger or more complex water uses, beyond small home use. If you use surface water or water for purposes other than a home, use Part C. Part C is also for homes that use more than 500 gpd (which is uncommon) or any situation requiring a water right document.

What if I share my well with my neighbors?

It's common for neighbors to share wells. If a few homes rely on the well and operate independently, each homeowner can file a separate court claim form. List your own home's location as the "place of use" and the well location under "well location," whether or not you own the property the well is located on.

If the well is operated among neighbors as a group, the group's authorized representative should file a single claim form on behalf of the group. If there is no designated representative, contact Ecology for help. Groups must fill out Part C using the purpose of "Group Domestic," listing all parcels receiving water as "place of use." Individual homeowners within the group do not need to file separate claim forms if one is submitted for the group.

FACT: Adjudication does not require meters for homes with wells. You do not need a meter to fill out your adjudication court claim form. Ecology does not intend to require homes to meter their water in the future.

FACT: Ecology cannot charge water usage fees for private wells.

I have a well for my home – and other water uses, too!

If you have both a home and another use (besides a half-acre or less of lawn and garden) at the same place, you may fill out both Parts B and C on the same form. For instance, you might have a home *and* some livestock. You can claim your home under Part B and then add a claim for "stockwater" to Part C. If you have more than one Part B water use or more than one Part C water use, you will need to submit those on additional court claim forms. If your multiple uses have different locations or began on different dates, submit a separate claim form for each use.

If you own multiple homes on different parcels (such as rentals in different areas), and they do not share water as a group, you should fill out a separate court claim form for each home.

Tools to get you started:

- Most homes use less than 500 gpd. Estimate whether your water use is 500 gpd or less with Whatcom County Public Works [water use calculators](#).
- Get your well report by going to [Ecology's Well Report Viewer](#). If your well is recorded, the report should have important information to help submit the claim form including well depth and tag number. Not all wells have a report, so don't worry. Just do your best to complete the form.
- Find out when your home was first built and get your property parcel number with the well. In Whatcom County, this is also called the Geo ID number or "Geo Parcel Number." It's 16 (sixteen) digits and can be found here: [Whatcom County Assessor Records](#) or [Whatcom County Tax Parcel Viewer](#).

Related Information:

- WRIA 1 (Nooksack area) adjudication webpage: ecology.wa.gov/nooksack-adjudication
- Whatcom County Superior Court: whatcomcounty.us/4326/water-adjudication



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To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6831 or email at ecyadacoordinator@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.