

# WRIA 15 Kitsap Watershed Water Availability



Port Orchard; Photo by David Seibold,  
<https://flic.kr/p/2hMtiXe>

## Overview

- Introduction to WRIA 15
- Water Availability Factors
- Options for Acquiring Water
- Resources
- Map

## Introduction to WRIA 15

The Kitsap Watershed or Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 15 is situated in south central Puget Sound and comprises all of Kitsap County plus parts of Mason, Pierce, and King counties. It is bounded to the east by Puget Sound and to the west by Hood Canal.

The watershed includes the Union and Tahuya rivers, and numerous creek systems of various sizes that discharge directly to Puget Sound and Hood Canal.

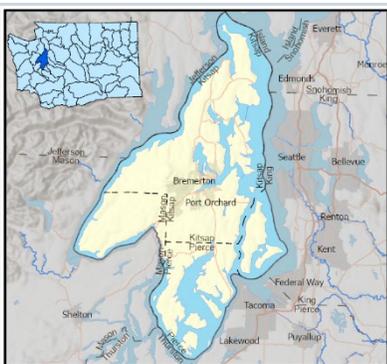
### How can I get water?

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.



### 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.

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
- [RCW 90.94](#): Streamflow Restoration
- [WAC 173-515](#): The Instream Flow Rule for WRIA 15

## Water Availability Factors

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

- Instream flow rule
- Existing water rights, including unquantified Tribal rights
- Seawater intrusion
- Precipitation

Refer to a map at the end of the document.



### 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 15 has an instream flow rule, adopted to preserve the uses and values of individual rivers and streams.

The instream flow rule:

- Protects the rivers and a number of creeks 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.

Note that groundwater wells nearly always impact nearby streams. RCW 90.94 allows new homes using permit-exempt groundwater to potentially impact instream flows and closures in this watershed.

### Existing water rights

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

---

## Tribal interests

The Port Madison Indian Reservation, home of the Suquamish People, and the Port Gamble S'klallam Reservation are located within WRIA 15. These tribes, and others, also hold federally reserved treaty rights to fish, hunt, and gather in the watershed. While unquantified, the tribes may claim the most senior water rights in the WRIA. Tribes are concerned about maintaining necessary flows and fish habitat. Water right applications and mitigation plans are routinely sent to the Tribes for review and comment.

## Seawater intrusion

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

## Precipitation

Average precipitation ranges from about 20 inches per year at the northern tip of the peninsula to about 70 inches per year in the southernmost areas. Most of this precipitation arrives during the winter months when water demands are the lowest, and only a fraction becomes available for human and economic uses. During the summer, there is little rain, so low stream flows are dependent on groundwater inflow. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

## 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 15 are also yet to be fully realized. However, it is apparent that water availability is limited throughout the Kitsap 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), although in some areas, including WRIA 15, there are other restrictions (see [Domestic uses](#), later in this section).
- 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 housing subdivision 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. There is no exemption from permitting for surface water diversions.



**Domestic uses**

If your project will rely on a well drilled before January 19, 2018, you are regulated solely under RCW 90.44.050, and the requirements under RCW 90.94 do not apply.

The following describes additional requirements set forth by RCW 90.94.030 for single and group domestic uses that will rely on a well drilled on or after January 19, 2018.

***If you are building a new home that will rely on a new<sup>1</sup> permit-exempt well:***

- Your *combined* indoor and outdoor domestic water use is limited to 950 gpd as a maximum annual average, not to exceed 5,000 gpd on any given day. For example, you could withdraw 3,000 gallons on one summer day, so long as you do not do so enough that your average exceeds 950 gpd in a year.
- Your outdoor personal lawn and garden remain limited to an area no greater than one-half acre. (Note that your outdoor water use for your lawn and garden is included in the 950 gpd annual average limit.)
- If there is a drought emergency declaration, water use can be restricted to 350 gpd for indoor uses only, with the exception of any water needed to maintain a fire control buffer.



***If you are building more than one home reliant on a new permit-exempt well:***

The withdrawal limit for each home is “per connection”, meaning that for subdivisions, each home is limited to the 950 gpd maximum annual average limit and the 350 gpd indoor use only during a declared drought emergency. However, the entire subdivision is limited to the 5,000 gpd limit and ½-acre personal lawn and garden in total across all the homes in the subdivision.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1. Permit-exempt domestic use for an individual home or group use.**

Criteria	Well drilled on or after Jan. 19, 2018	Well drilled before Jan. 19, 2018
<b>Water limitation per day</b>	5,000 gpd	5,000 gpd
<b>Annual average daily use limit per home</b>	950 gpd	-
<b>Irrigation allowed per single or group use exemption</b>	½ acre	½ acre
<b>Read the fine print</b>	<a href="#">RCW 90.94.030</a> <a href="#">RCW 90.44.050</a>	<a href="#">RCW 90.44.050</a>

\*During a state drought declaration for the area, water use may be limited to 350 gpd.

<sup>1</sup> Drilled on or after January 19, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Established under RCW 90.44.050.

## 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, 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 be a very difficult and expensive process. It requires hiring 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 address the impact of the water withdrawal or diversion on instream flows, closures, 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.

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.

### Change or transfer an existing water right

It can be easier to buy an existing water right and change the place of use, the point of diversion or withdrawal, or the purpose or manner of use. Changing 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.

### Processing options

The wait for your water right application to be processed can be years. To speed up the process, you can 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 for supplying water to your project at a pre-application consultation with Ecology. To schedule, submit the [pre-application consultation form](#).

## Resources

### Contact Information

Ecology Northwest Regional Office  
Mailing address: PO Box 330316, Shoreline,  
WA 98133-9716  
Physical address: 15700 Dayton Ave N,  
Shoreline, WA  
Phone: 206-594-0000

### 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](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 05-11-016  
<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](https://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>

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

