

## Improving Water Management in Washington

**Goals:** Enable Washington's water resources to be more effectively managed to ensure adequate water for people, farms and ecosystem functions within specified timeframes and provide greater predictability, certainty, flexibility and resources for water users/managers at both the local and state level.

**Mechanism:** Voluntarily developed basin-specific water budgets and water management programs and rules.

This approach would authorize the development of a water budget at the watershed or sub-watershed level to determine past and present water uses, water resources, and estimated future water needs for all uses. The water budget serves as the basis for a basin-specific water management program that would be developed by either an existing or new watershed group or by the State either at the request of such a watershed group or at the request of sufficient local governments and tribal entities that don't otherwise constitute a watershed group. If developed by a watershed group, the planning group would work with Ecology in developing the water budget and program, and submit the completed program to Ecology for approval.

An approved water management program would form the basis for subsequent water-related decisions that affect that watershed or basin. The program would be designed to ensure that the basin is managing towards a balanced water budget within a specified timeframe. The water management program would be reviewed periodically to assess its implementation and progress towards addressing any shortfalls in the water budget. Sufficient resources would be devoted within the basin to ensure adequate management, oversight and enforcement of the water management program, including adapting it as necessary over time.

Managing water resources through water budgets is a logical extension of the watershed planning process currently conducted in many basins in Washington, with the added incentives of providing implementation resources and regulatory reforms to assist basins in actually meeting their planning goals. However, this approach is not restricted to those basins that have completed development of a watershed plan or have in existence a current watershed planning group. However developed, when approved by Ecology, the water management program will provide the direction, framework, flexibility and the tools to reach the water management goals for that basin. This flexibility and these tools include:

- funding for infrastructure, conservation, mitigation and water acquisition needed to help meet the goals of the program;
- integration of land use planning and the water management program to reconcile water demands and development patterns;
- mechanisms to enable collective mitigation of individual exempt wells that would otherwise impair senior water rights and/or instream flows;
- a reduced 'look back' period when assessing relinquishment of water rights;
- streamlining and establishing preferred status for water transfers, new water rights, and other water permitting decisions for the basin consistent with the water budget/water management program.