

Ground Water Data and Management

The proposal: An enhanced ground water monitoring program will be developed in identified areas with resource constraints, and current law regarding basin closures will be clarified.

Elements of the proposal: The Department of Ecology will implement an enhanced ground water data program in selected geographic areas of the state in which: (1) there are existing water resource constraints as indicated by declining well yields or other factors; or (2) resource constraints are likely within the next twenty years based on population growth and water use demand projections. The program will include measurement and water use reporting for new appropriations under Water Code permits. It will require Ecology to exercise current Code authority to require measurement and reporting for new exempt well uses unless an alternative data collection approach is adopted for a specific basin. Measurement and reporting of existing ground water uses which historically have withdrawn over ten acre feet annually must also measure and report water use in these identified areas. In these identified basins Ecology will prepare and periodically ground water resource assessments based upon water usage and resource monitoring and characterization data. Current law is clarified to expressly allow Ecology by rule to close a ground water source to further appropriation when it determines that there is no available water for further appropriation, and to close a ground water source that is in direct hydraulic continuity with a surface water source closed to further appropriation.

Why it's needed: Ground water resource and use data is a critical component of an adequate management program, yet it is largely lacking anywhere in the state. Ecology has the ability to monitor groundwater areas, collect data, and keep a water resources information system as part of their Water Resource Data Program (RCW 90.54.030). Most of the general information collected is found on Ecology's website. However data collection is maintained throughout many of the individual programs at Ecology, local governments, and the federal government and has not been combined into one uniform database. Additionally, Ecology rarely if ever exercises current administrative authority of require new exempt well owners to measure and report water use.

Related elements: An enhanced data and analysis program will be needed to adequately implement the "sustainable" ground water management policy and will improve the review of stock water permit applications.