

Assisting New Livestock Operations to Find Water

The proposal: The state will assemble staff and financial resources to assist new larger livestock industry operations to locate in areas with water supplies that may serve the operation without causing water management conflict with other uses.

Elements of the proposal: From funding provided in the 2010 supplemental budget, the state Department of Agriculture (WSDA) will lead a multi-agency initiative to assist in identifying areas in which new larger livestock operations may be sited with the least risk of causing or increasing water resource management conflicts. The WSU Agricultural Extension, in consultation with the livestock industry, WSDA, Ecology, and WSU's Water Research Center, will conduct a study assessing projected industry trends in the state, locational factors, and an identification of areas where new operations may be sited with the greatest assurance of available water supplies. New operations proposed for siting in such areas will receive assistance from the Office of Regulatory Assistance, Ecology and the Department of Commerce in obtaining necessary state permits and approvals. Ecology will expedite processing water rights changes and transfers associated with such an operation. Where new water diversions or withdrawals are sought for such an operation, the consistency with the WSU siting study will be recognized in applying the water availability standard to the application. Ecology may provide grants to WRIA planning units in such identified areas for the purpose of creating water banks, exchanges or other mechanisms to move water toward new uses, in which prospective livestock operations are among the target user groups.

Why it is needed: The state has many programs that target assistance to specific commercial or industrial sectors. Among its water resource management programs are targeted initiatives toward segments of water users. Examples include deep well irrigators in the Odessa, interruptible water right holders on the Columbia mainstem, and Skagit Valley agricultural water users that must modify their operations because of new fish recovery requirements. If the legal and policy uncertainties around the stock water provisions of the Ground Water Code's permit exemption are resolved in a manner that limits the exemption in the future to relatively small operations, it is appropriate that the state place a particular focus on those prospective new operations that must seek an alternative pathway to obtaining an assured water supply. The state thus has a vital interest in helping this industry find water in ways that will not create conflicts with existing water uses and is justified in targeting state financial and agency resources to this end.

Related elements: This assistance program assumes enactment of other proposals that would place a volumetric cap upon the Ground Water Code permit exemption for stock water purposes and would require Water Code approval for uses above the cap.