

Tribal-State agreements to deliver water from Lake Roosevelt to farms, towns and salmon in Eastern Washington

Historic Partnership

Gov. Chris Gregoire has signed legislation approving historic partnerships with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Spokane Tribe of Indians and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to deliver essential new water supplies to the Odessa area, to eastern Washington farms and cities, and to river flows to help salmon and steelhead. The water will come from annual releases of up to 132,000 acre feet of water from the Lake Roosevelt reservoir, which is located partly within the Colville and Spokane Reservations.

Irrigators have seen the Odessa aquifer drop an average of seven feet per year for decades. Some potato farmers have been forced to deepen their wells to more than 2,000 feet.

The new agreement will slow the depletion of the Odessa aquifer and will protect the region's \$600 million-a-year agriculture economy and 7,500 jobs.

In addition, here are some key benefits from the agreements:

- Irrigators holding "interruptible" water rights will be less likely to have to curtail or even cease their water use during droughts.
- Some cities in the Columbia Basin that have been waiting for years for new water supplies will be able to better serve the projected population growth of 20 percent over the next 20 years.

Higher flows in the basin at critical times of the year will help improve fish runs in the Columbia and its tributaries. The fish runs are at less than 10 percent of historic levels due in part to low flows in the basin.

MORE INFORMATION

Water Needs in the Columbia Basin Map

www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/images/pdf/lkroos_map.pdf

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Q: What is the state's authority to enter into agreements to release water from Lake Roosevelt to help other parts of Eastern Washington with their water supply problems?

A: The tribes are agreeing to the delivery of up to 132,500 acre-feet of water from Lake Roosevelt in drought years. This amount of water will lower lake levels no more than an additional 1.5 feet below current operations. When coordinated with lake fluctuations under existing operations, the new release will at times not even be noticed. More importantly, the financial packages that the state agreed to provide to the Colville and Spokane tribes are intended, in part, to offset any impacts that do occur. In addition, Gov. Gregoire's request for \$2 million to offset effects on adjacent local governments was approved by the 2008 Legislature.

Q: Will the public have the opportunity to comment on these agreements?

A: Ecology has initiated a public process to develop an environmental review (supplemental to the Columbia River Environmental Impact Statement). This will provide an opportunity to gather input from citizens and consider strategies to address concerns or problems.

Q: How has the state communicated with Lake Roosevelt residents?

A: We have worked closely with the Spokane and Colville tribes. Ecology meets regularly to discuss issues with county commissioners from the affected area. We

have held public workshops and made presentations at meetings hosted by the Lake Roosevelt Forum. The state will do what is necessary to ensure that interested citizens have opportunities to participate in decision-making for allocation and delivery of the water made available under these agreements.

Q: How does the water get from Lake Roosevelt to Odessa? What has to be done to make this happen? Does something have to be built?

A: The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation will deliver water to the Odessa using existing infrastructure. Water will be lifted from the lake at Grand Coulee Dam and conveyed to Banks Lake. Capacity is available within the East Low Canal to deliver this first increment of water to farms.

Q: Why doesn't the state of Washington just purchase water rights from willing sellers?

A: At current market rates, it would be cost-prohibitive for the state to acquire a similar quantity of water (132,500 acre feet) by purchasing water rights. In addition, the acquisition of this quantity of water by the state could hurt communities by permanently denying them access to water that would be transferred elsewhere.

Q: Does this agreement sell or transfer water from the tribes to the state?

A: No. This agreement does not affect either tribe's water rights or future water right claims. The tribes' water rights on Lake Roosevelt are not quantified. Early on the state took a look at this and realized that seeking to quantify tribal and other water rights would take many years and would be highly contentious among all the parties claiming rights to the Columbia River. Our water needs are now. Litigation has already caused much of the gridlock in accessing new water supplies for the Columbia River. The state and the tribes agreed to join in a cooperative government to government approach, similar to other agreements between the state and Reclamation and irrigation districts.

Q. Why is the state agreeing to make payments to the tribes?

A. The Colville and Spokane Reservations include large portions of Lake Roosevelt, and much of Grand Coulee Dam is within the Colville Reservation. The state recognizes that the Colville and Spokane tribes have cultural, economic, archaeological and environmental and natural resource interests that have been affected by the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam and operations at Lake Roosevelt. In addition, the tribes are concerned about the harm of current and future river operations and heavy metals pollution from upstream mines in Canada.

Q. How much will the tribes receive and how will that money be used?

A. The 2008 Legislature approved funds for the tribes for fisheries enhancement, cultural resources protection, recreation improvements, reservation water program planning, education, and economic and governmental infrastructure development. The Colville Confederated Tribes and the Spokane Tribe of Indians will receive an annual payment of approximately \$3.75 million and \$2.25 million respectively, adjusted for inflation.

Q. What benefits do towns and counties in the area receive from this agreement?

A. Some local governments will receive needed water that is not currently available to them. For local governments around Lake Roosevelt, the 2008 Legislature approved Gov. Gregoire's request for \$2 million to address priority water issues.

Q: Who will benefit from this agreement?

A: Farmers, water-right applicants and fish will benefit. Specifically:

- Irrigators of 10,000 acres of land who now rely on the Odessa aquifer will receive surface water and reduce their reliance on the rapidly depleting aquifer.
- The 330 holders of "interruptible" water rights will receive needed certainty that they will be able to irrigate during drought years. The

addition of 33,000 acre-feet of irrigation water will create a “drought insurance” program for these irrigators.

- As many as 128 municipal and industrial water-right applicants located within one mile of the Columbia River.
- 45,000 acre feet of water will be available during critical drought years to increase water held in rivers and streams to benefit endangered salmon and improve the health of the Columbia River.

Q: Will Odessa irrigators have to give up their ground water rights once they get replacement water from the Columbia?

A: State water law specific to the Odessa provides that replaced ground water rights become reserve or standby rights (not subject to relinquishment for nonuse) that can be used later if the Columbia water deliveries cease.

Q: Where does the money come from to fund the agreements?

A: The state’s General Fund.

Q: Does this mean that there will be “new” water to appropriate to people on the waiting list?

A: For specific categories of water users, the answer is “yes.” Additional water permits will be issued to the Bureau of Reclamation for the Odessa farmers and to pending municipal applications. A pool of water to insure against future interruptibility during droughts also will be available.

Q: When will the drawdown begin to occur?

A: The Department of Ecology is on track to issue new water permits as early as fall 2008.