

A scenic photograph of Lake Roosevelt, showing the calm blue water in the foreground, forested hillsides on the right, and distant mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The title text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

Lake Roosevelt Supplemental Water Releases

Background

Since 2004, a coalition of stakeholders including the Department of Ecology (Ecology), Department of Fish & Wildlife, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau), Columbia Basin irrigation districts, and the Colville and Spokane tribes have been investigating the potential for release of additional water from Lake Roosevelt. The storage releases will provide an additional 82,500-132,500 acre-feet of water to:

- Supplement instream flows (27,500 acre-feet each year)
- Provide water for municipal and industrial use (25,000 acre-feet each year).
- Switch water users in the Odessa Subarea from groundwater to surface water (30,000 acre-feet each year).
- Supplement instream flows (17,000 acre-feet additional in drought years)
- Provide water to interruptible water right holders (33,000 acre-feet in drought years).

In March 2008, the Governor and the Legislature approved a funding agreement with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Spokane Tribe of Indians, whose reservations border the lake, to protect tribal interests associated with the storage release.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Environmental Review

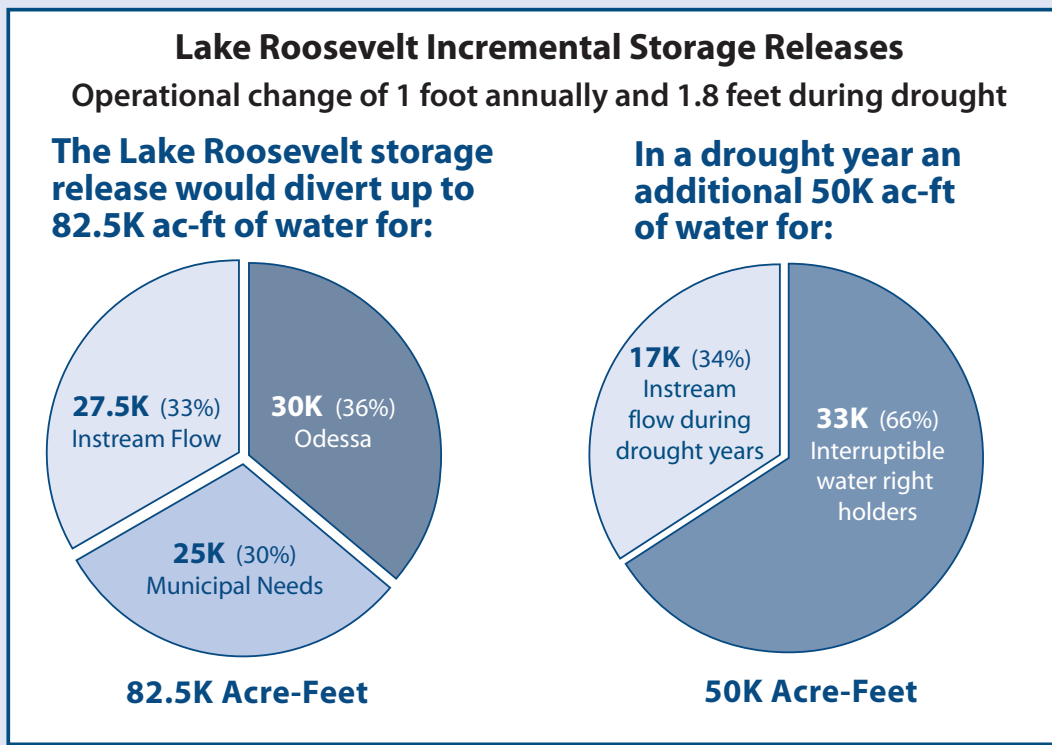
Ecology is now preparing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to assess how various alternatives for releasing and distributing the water will impact the environment. A draft SEIS will be released for public review in May 2008 and a final SEIS is expected in July 2008. Specifically, the SEIS will:

- Evaluate scenarios for releasing water in wet, average, dry, and drought years.
- Identify operating level constraints (Flood Control, Fish Migration, Recreation).
- Explore policy options on how to distribute the water to competing water users.
- Identify how to release the water to maximize fish benefit.
- Consider whether an overriding consideration of the public interest (OCPI) determination is appropriate in cases where supply cannot match perfectly with demand.

Bureau Permitting

Water released from storage will be authorized under the Bureau's 1938 reserve of water for the Columbia Basin Project. Secondary use permits will be issued in the Fall of 2008 to authorize releases of water for use in the Odessa and for instream flows. The municipal and industrial water will be authorized initially as instream flow water to perfect the use and to allow Ecology time to work through the 130+ pending municipal and industrial applications. A secondary use permit will not be needed for release of water during drought, because the Bureau has existing authority under the Federal Drought Relief Act. Instead, Ecology will enter into a water supply delivery contract with the Bureau.

Following the release of water pursuant to the preferred SEIS alternative, the instream flow water will be conveyed to Ecology's trust water program in 2009. The instream flow portion will be managed pursuant to the fisheries recommendations in the SEIS. The municipal and industrial portion will be held both for instream flow benefit and to mitigation for new out-of-stream uses.



Allocating Water for the Odessa Subarea (30,000 acre-feet)

Ecology is working with the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District to identify how the 30,000 acre-feet can be delivered on-farm as quickly as possible. The District is identifying land owners interested in substituting surface water supplies for their existing groundwater wells. In some cases, local improvement districts (LIDs) will need to be formed to allow land owners to partner on the costs of building laterals from the East Low Canal to their properties. Once surface water is delivered, Ecology will modify the existing groundwater certificates to standby/reserve status.

Allocating Water for Municipal Needs (25,000 acre-feet)

Following selection of an allocation policy for municipal and industrial applicants in the SEIS and conveyance of the water to the trust water program, Ecology will begin issuing new water rights to approximately 130 municipal and industrial applicants.

Allocating Water for Interruptible Water Rights (33,000 acre-feet)

There are approximately 380 holders of interruptible water rights in the Columbia River Basin. Ecology prefers to issue drought permits in advance of the next Columbia River drought in order to provide water right holders with greater certainty in their supplies and to avoid permitting workload constraints. Following selection of a SEIS allocation alternative for the drought water and signing of a water supply delivery contract with the Bureau (in 2008), Ecology will begin issuing drought permits. Drought permits will be provisioned so that water right holders must call in to Ecology's drought hotline during times of drought to determine water availability. The availability of water to each drought user will depend on the SEIS policy choice on allocating drought supplies for Lake Roosevelt, and Ecology's other future drought portfolio holdings (e.g. dry year leases, trust water from conservation projects, other storage options, etc.).