

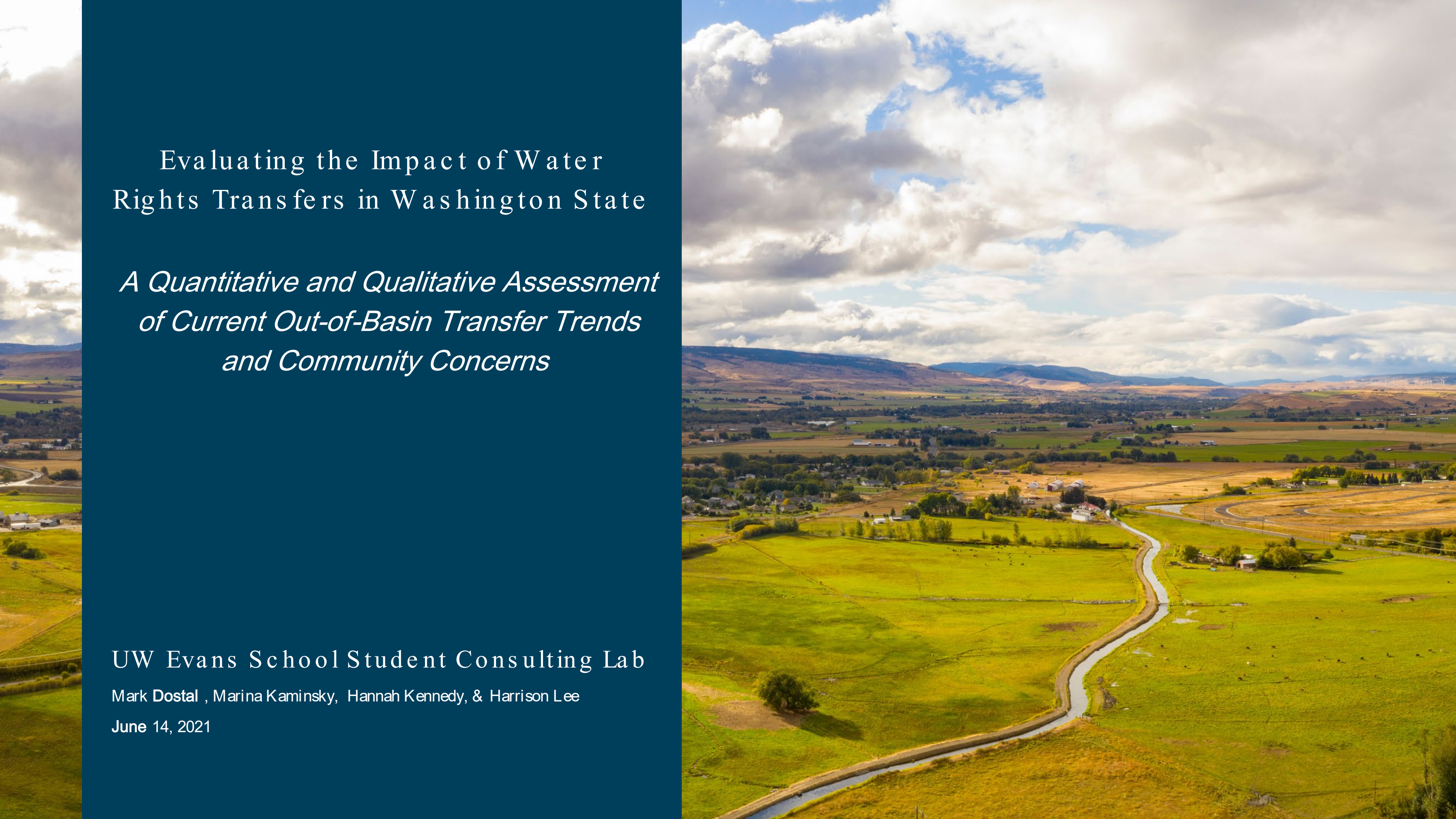
Evaluating the Impact of Water Rights Transfers in Washington State

A Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment of Current Out-of-Basin Transfer Trends and Community Concerns

UW Evans School Student Consulting Lab

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Capstone Project

For more than two decades, the Evans School Student Consulting Lab has been producing program evaluations, strategic plans, policy analyses, and new program proposals that address the real-world needs of public, nonprofit, philanthropic, and private organizations.

Research Questions

- What are the local and regional economic, social, and environmental effects of water rights transfers in Washington state?
- To what extent are out-of-basin water rights transfers occurring across Washington state?
- According to stakeholders, what are the key concerns and opportunities related to out-of-basin transfers?



Research Methodology



Quantitative analysis is identifying water rights transfers that traveled 5+ (land) miles, changed WRIs, and changed WRIs and counties.

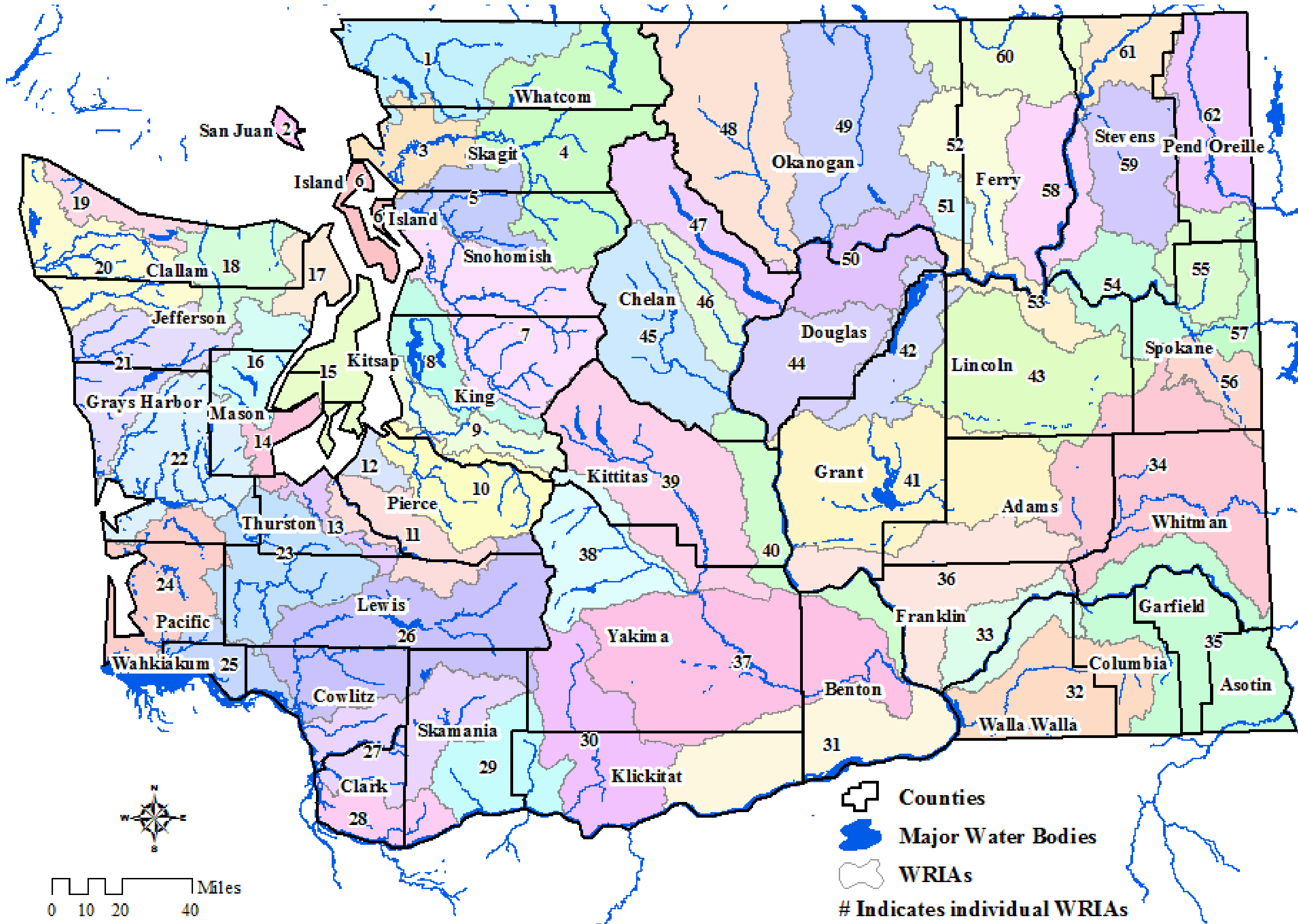


In-depth qualitative interviews with various stakeholders and practitioners.



Case studies exploring qualitative themes through specific transaction examples.

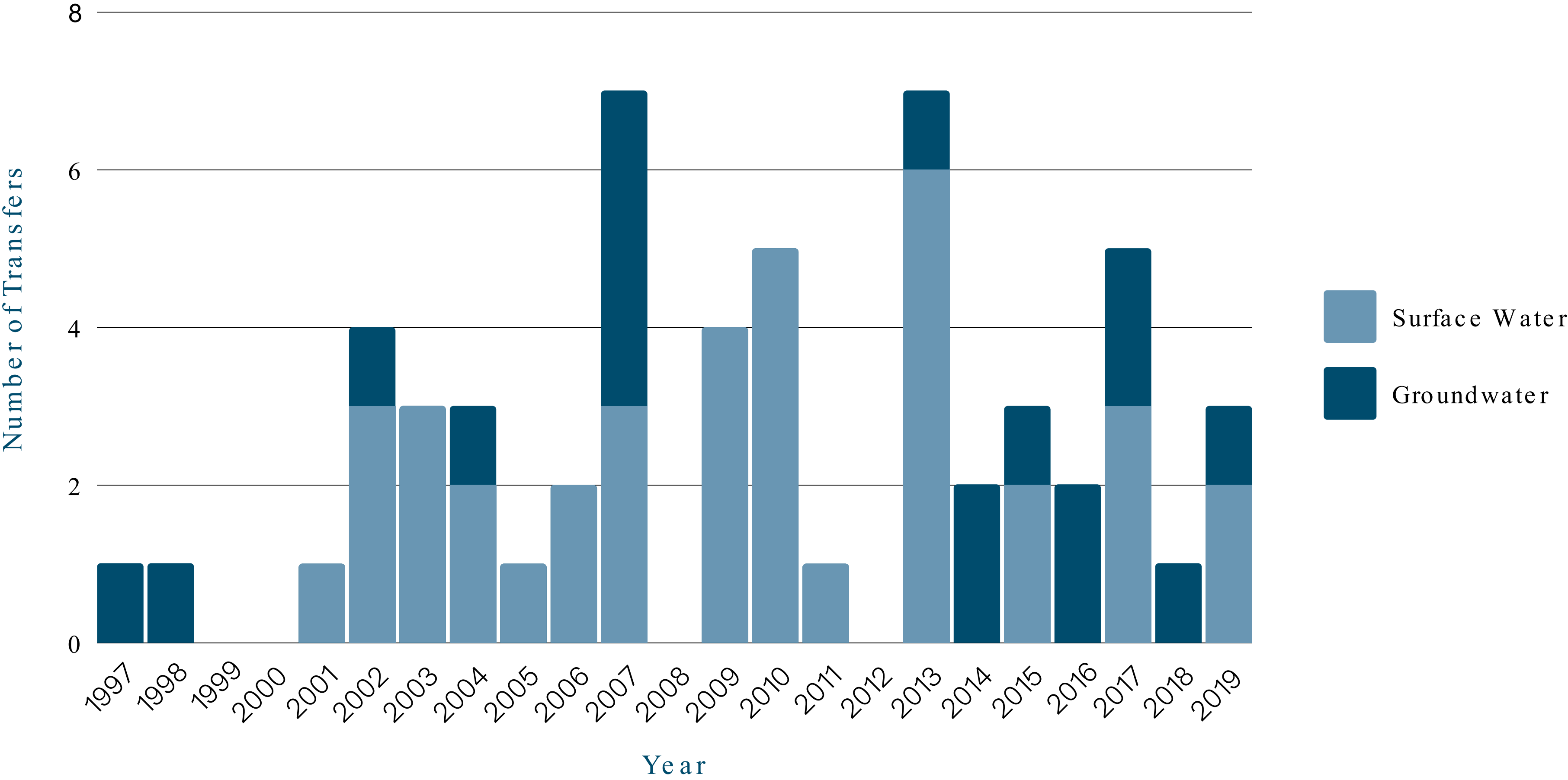
STUDY AREA: WRIAs, COUNTIES, & MAJOR WATER BODIES



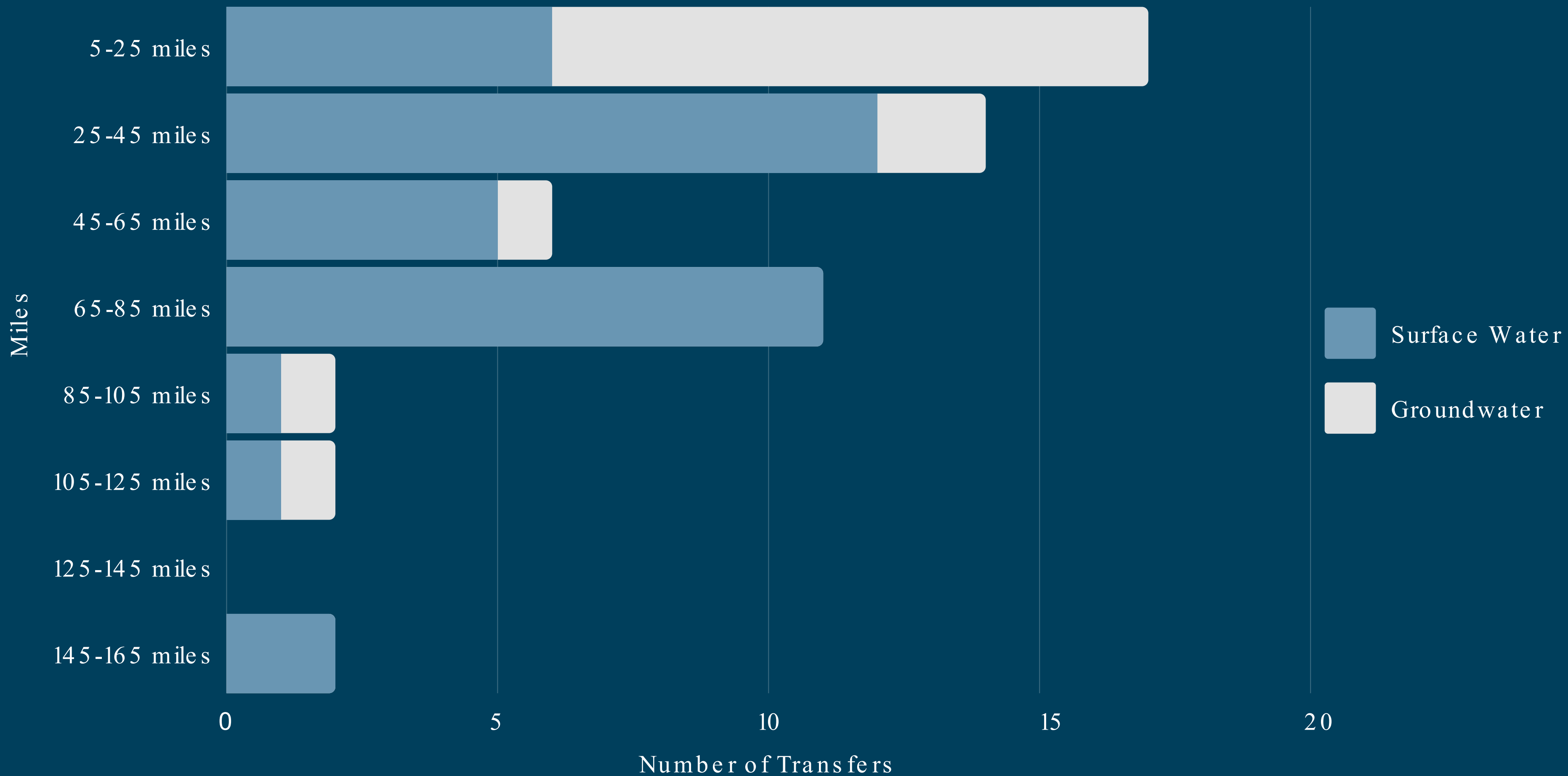
Quantitative Findings

- Between 1997 and 2019, 54 records, totaling 11,182 annual acre feet, traveled more than 5 (land) miles and changed WRIsAs.
 - 43 of these also indicated a change in county.
- Transfer activity varied by WRIA and county.
- Most rights retained their original type of use.
 - 39 rights (72%), totaling 8296.75 AF, maintained their irrigation function.
- In general, more transfer applications were submitted between 2009-2019, than the prior decade.
 - Surface water rights transfer applications peaked in 2013.

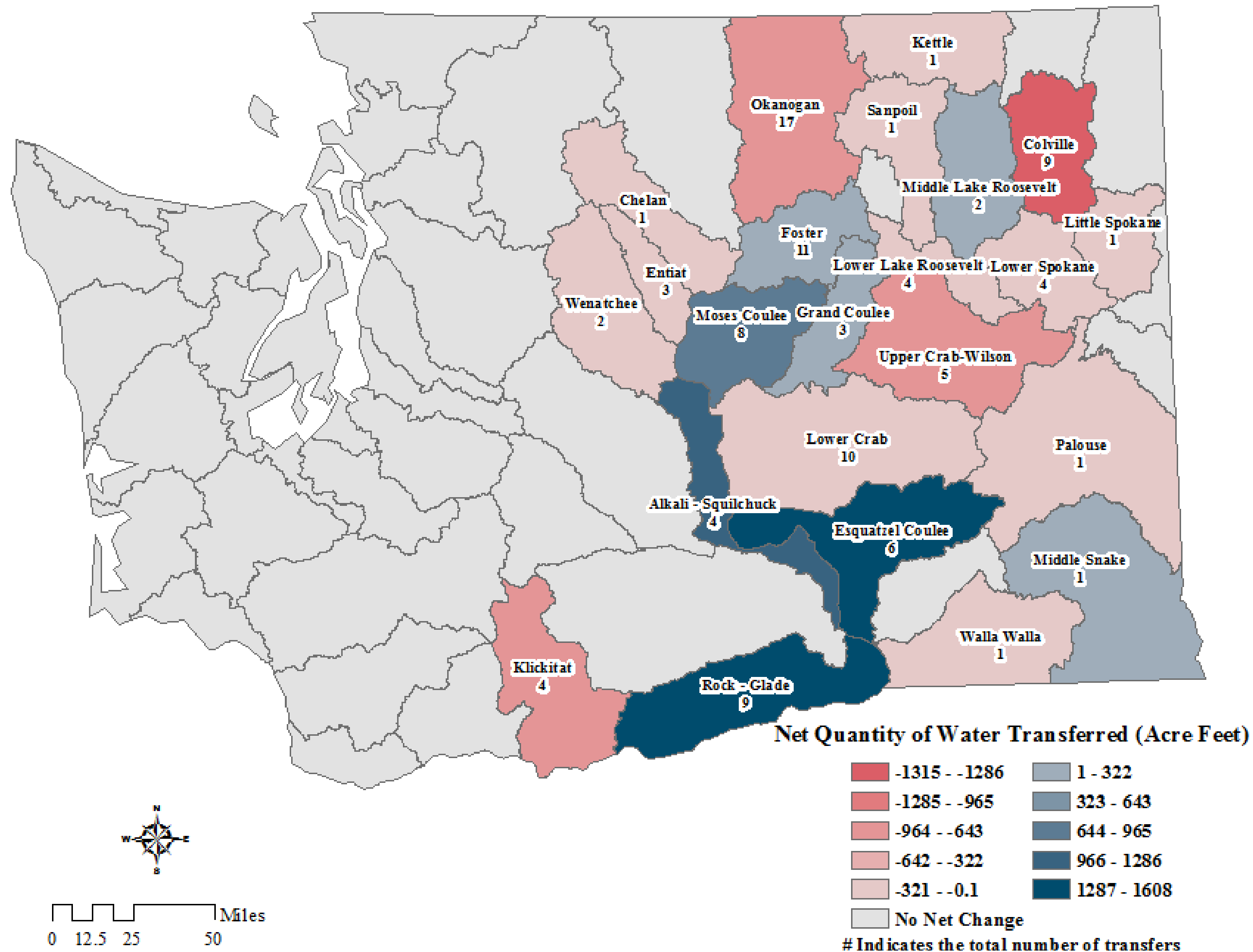
Estimated Year of Transfer



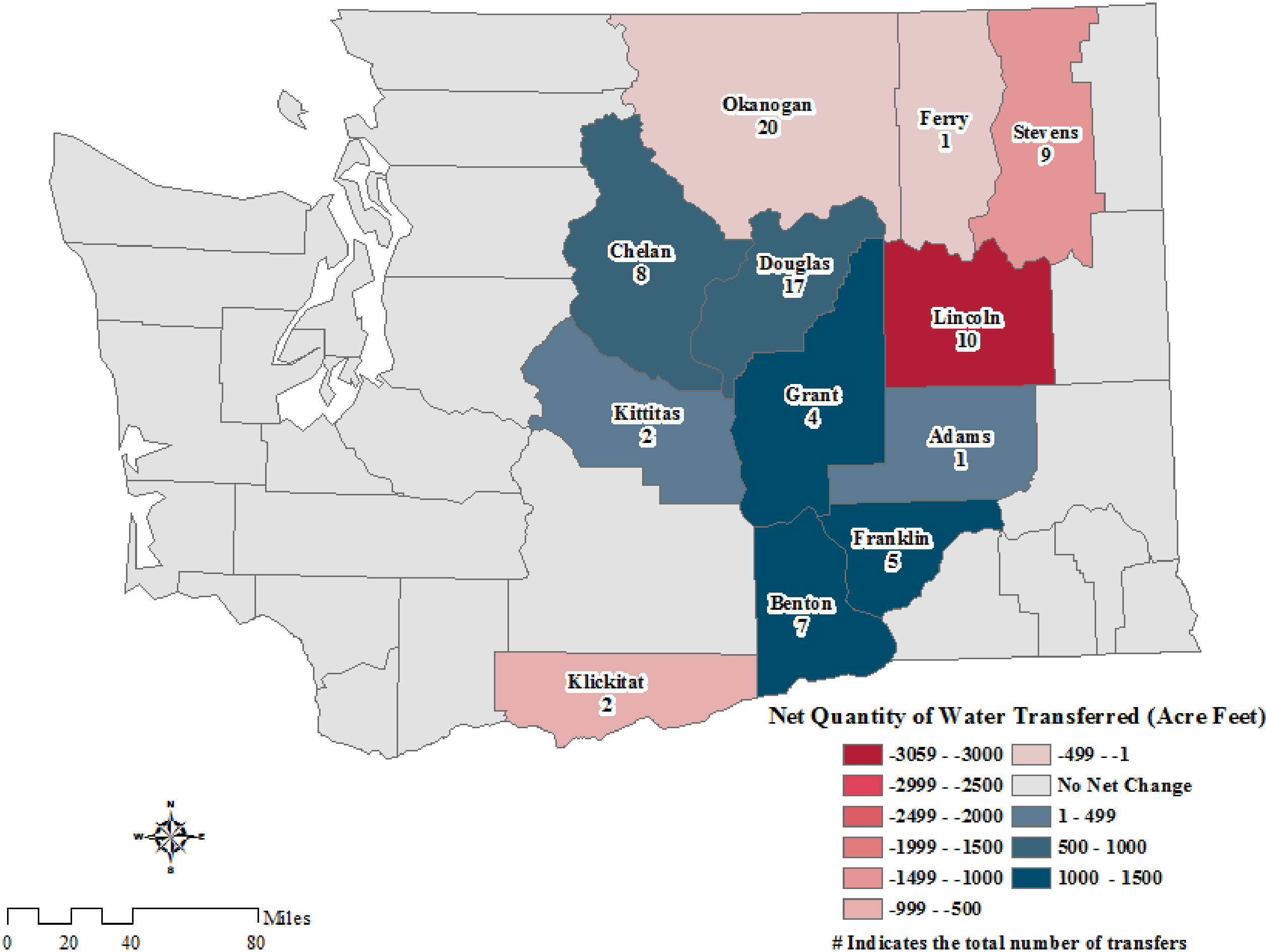
Overland Distance of Transfer



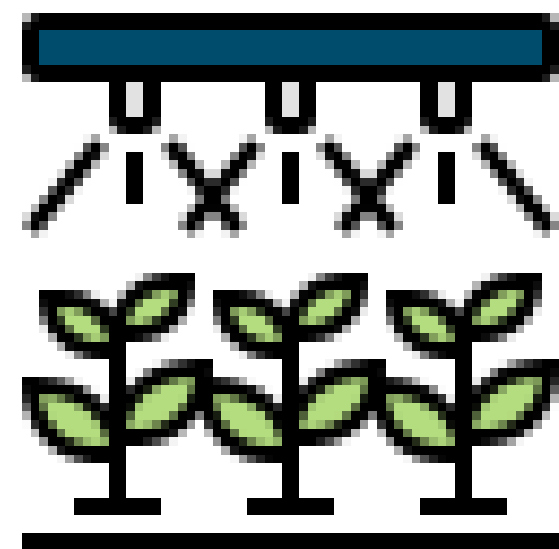
Relative Net Water Quantity and Total Number of Transfers by WRIA



Relative Net Water Quantity and Total Number of Transfers by County

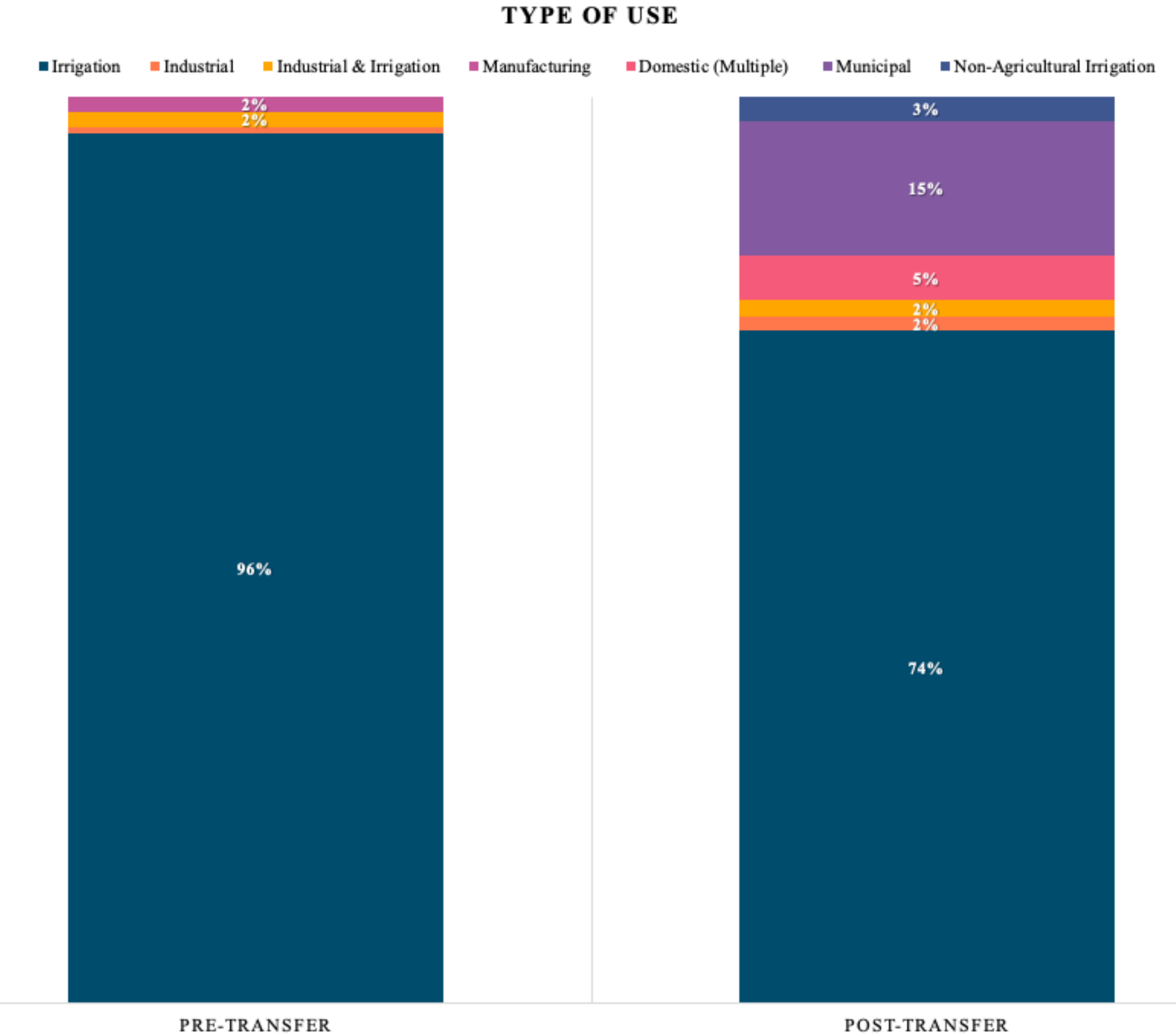


Change of Use



72% of transfers retained their irrigation function.

14 of 54 transfers (26%) resulted in a change of use. 12 of these rights changed from irrigation to domestic, municipal, and non-agricultural irrigation uses.





All Out-Of-Bas in Transfers Moved to the Columbia River

- Bulldog Creek (1)
- Columbia River (5)
- Colville River (3)
- Eagle Creek (1)
- Kettle River (1)
- Little Klickitat River (2)
- Mad River (3)
- Mill Creek
(Little Klickitat River) (2)
- North Fork Chewelah Creek
(Colville River) (2)
- Okanogan River (10)
- Sheep Creek (Colville River) (1)
- Spokane River (2)
- Unnamed Spring (Hunters
Creek) (1)
- Welsh Creek (1)
- Wenatchee River (1)

Qualitative Findings

- Differing Perspectives on Economic & Social Impacts
 - Distributional vs. Efficiency concerns
- Concerns about Water Speculation
 - Real vs. Imagined
- Irrigator distrust of Ecology
 - Fear of Ecology "haircut"



Qualitative Findings

- Public lacks appropriate access to information on water rights and transfers, including valuation information.
- Downstream transfers are beneficial for ecosystems.
- Water banking and long-term leasing may be useful water management strategies.





THE LONG-DISTANCE
TRANSFER



THE RETIREMENT PLAN

Case Studies



THE CONTINGENT DEAL/
THE FAMILY TRUST



THE REGIONAL PLAYER



THE PHANTOM TRANSFER

Data Limitations

- W R T S Database design limitations
- Lack of additional data availability
- Unable to obtain first-hand accounts from sellers/buyer



Study

Limitations


- Asymmetries between water rights records and actual use
- Lack of economic and environmental water rights valuation information
- Distributional effects & tribal governance considerations
- COVID-19 barriers





Summary & Key Takeaways

- Data does not directly substantiate interviewee concerns, but study has significant limitations.
- Report is retrospective
- Lack of information is a key limitation and finding

A scenic mountain landscape. In the background, a large, rugged mountain peak is covered in snow and patches of brown rock. The slopes leading down from the peak are green with patches of snow. In the foreground, a rocky stream flows over large boulders, creating small waterfalls. The sky is a clear, deep blue.

Questions or Comments?

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