

Kittitas County’s Proposed 2019 Drought Leasing Program

Background

Drought-year water leases can help alleviate drought-related hardships by transferring water to meet critical water needs. Kittitas County acquired a portfolio of water rights to meet rural domestic water needs. Since a significant portion of these water rights have been secured for future domestic needs, not current or historic needs, Kittitas County is interested in making these water rights available in response to 2019 drought needs.

2019 Yakima Basin water supply is expected to be insufficient to meet water needs. The Bureau of Reclamation’s adopted May Total Water Supply Available (“TWSA”) forecast calls for prorated water users to receive 75% of their water allotment. On April 4, 2019, Governor Inslee declared a drought emergency the Upper Yakima River watershed and on May 20, 2019 this declaration was extended to the entire Yakima Basin.

2019 Water Right Holdings

Kittitas County has identified 235.677 acre-feet of consumptive use water that could be made available through leasing agreements (Table 1). This water is a subset of the County’s portfolio that was purchased through local funds to mitigate new uses and has not yet been allocated through mitigation certificates for domestic use and is not needed to meet projected County mitigation certificate demand during the 2019 irrigation season. All of Kittitas County’s water right holdings have a priority date senior to May 10, 1905, and most importantly, the subset of identified rights below are from tributary sources and remained fully available in the two most recent droughts: 2005 and 2015.

Table 1: The total quantity (expressed in acre-feet of consumptive use water) that Kittitas County has identified as available for potential 2019 drought leasing.

Kittitas County – Select Water Right Portfolio				
Priority Date	Water Source	Water Right Name	Original Qa (AF CU)	Remaining Qa (AF CU)
1900	Yakima River	Roth & Clennon ¹	23.783	16.647
1871	Manastash Creek	Williams ²	14.138	13.29
1871	Coleman Creek	Schnebly ³	205.74	205.74
Total Quantity of Water Available in 2019 (AF CU)				235.677

These water rights are readily available for mitigation given that they held in the State Trust Water Rights Program for mitigation; they are suitable for use in much of the Yakima basin; and the quantity of water available for transfer has been approved by the Washington State Department of Ecology.

Kittitas County would make these water rights available for lease in June, 2019 through a public auction process. The lessee will be responsible for submitting an emergency permit application and fee to the Washington State Department of Ecology and obtaining any and all necessary permissions needed to use the County’s Water Rights to mitigate their proposed water use.

¹ CS4-01676sb5d@3b(B) and CS4-01676sb5d@2b(B)

² CS4-01553sb11a(B)

³ CS4-02064sb10-84524 and CS4-01049sb10-85098