

Kittitas County’s Proposed 2023 Drought Leasing Program

Background

Drought-year water leases can help alleviate drought hardships by providing mitigation required to back the use of emergency drought wells 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 potential 2023 drought needs.

The Bureau of Reclamation’s mid-June update to the Total Water Supply Available (“TWSA”) lowered the proration rate to 73% from 77%. Governor Inslee has not declared a drought emergency, but Kittitas County wishes to be prepared to provide mitigation for emergency wells if needed.

2023 Water Right Holdings

Kittitas County has identified 153.294 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, has not yet been allocated through mitigation certificates for domestic use, is not already under lease agreement in 2023, and is not needed to meet projected County mitigation certificate demand during the 2023 irrigation season. The 800 AF-CU managed for “back mitigation” of historic water uses is excluded from the proposed potential 2023 Drought Leasing Program. All of Kittitas County’s water right holdings have a priority date senior to May 10, 1905.

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) | Available Qa (AF CU) |
| 1900 | Yakima River | Roth & Clennon ¹ | 23.783 | 16.518 |
| 1871 | Manastash Creek | Williams ² | 14.138 | 12.724 |
| 1874 | Manastash Creek | Amerinvest ³ | 67.203 | 48.641 |
| 1886 | Coleman Creek | Schnebly ⁴ | 264.21 | 75.411 |
| Total Quantity of Water Available in 2023 (AF CU) | | | | 153.294 |

These water rights are readily available for mitigation given that they are 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 should TWSA fall below 70% 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 CS4-01968sb11a

⁴ CS4-02064sb10 84434