

Low Flow Augmentation

Description

Low summer and early fall flows in rivers and streams are a major challenge for aquatic species restoration in the Chehalis Basin since without streamflow, there is no habitat. Climate change exacerbates this problem by both reducing available water in the summer and heating the remaining water above historical norms. Development in the region also threatens flows as new residents and other water users consume additional surface and groundwater. The Chehalis Basin Partnership identified potential projects to increase in-stream flows in their 2020 Addendum to the Chehalis Watershed Management Plan in response to a legislative mandate, RCW 90.94. Flow augmentation projects can include managed aquifer recharge, purchasing water rights to put into Trust for instream flow, and adding surface water storage, among others.

Potential Principles

Principle 1: Maintaining or improving summer low flows to a level comparable with historical flows is an important component of restoring aquatic species and improving resilience to climate change.

Principle 2: Population growth and increased demand for crop irrigation will add to the demands on streamflow and aquifers in the future. Meeting these needs while also protecting and restoring streamflow will require active management and informed investments.

Principle 3: Maintaining and improving summer low flows is one of the goals of the Chehalis Basin Partnership, which has already forged partnerships, written a plan, and identified potential projects.

Key Components

The Chehalis Basin Partnership currently meets every month to discuss and promote water flow augmentation projects. A lack of dedicated facilitation support holds back the effectiveness of the organization in identifying, coordinating, and promoting projects as well as adaptively managing its Streamflow Restoration Plan. The Strategy could fund dedicated facilitation to support the Partnership's work.

The Partnership is an ASRP project sponsor and other sponsor organizations can also take on flow augmentation projects. Low flow augmentation projects that benefit aquatic species can be prioritized and funded through the ASRP.

Cost

Total estimated 30-Year Cost: \$750,000.

This estimated cost is for \$25,000 per year to facilitate the operation of the Chehalis Basin Partnership. Costs for low flow augmentation projects are assumed to come from ASRP expenditures or external sources of funding, such as Ecology's streamflow grant program.

More Information

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Refer to chehalisbasinpartnership.org for more details.