



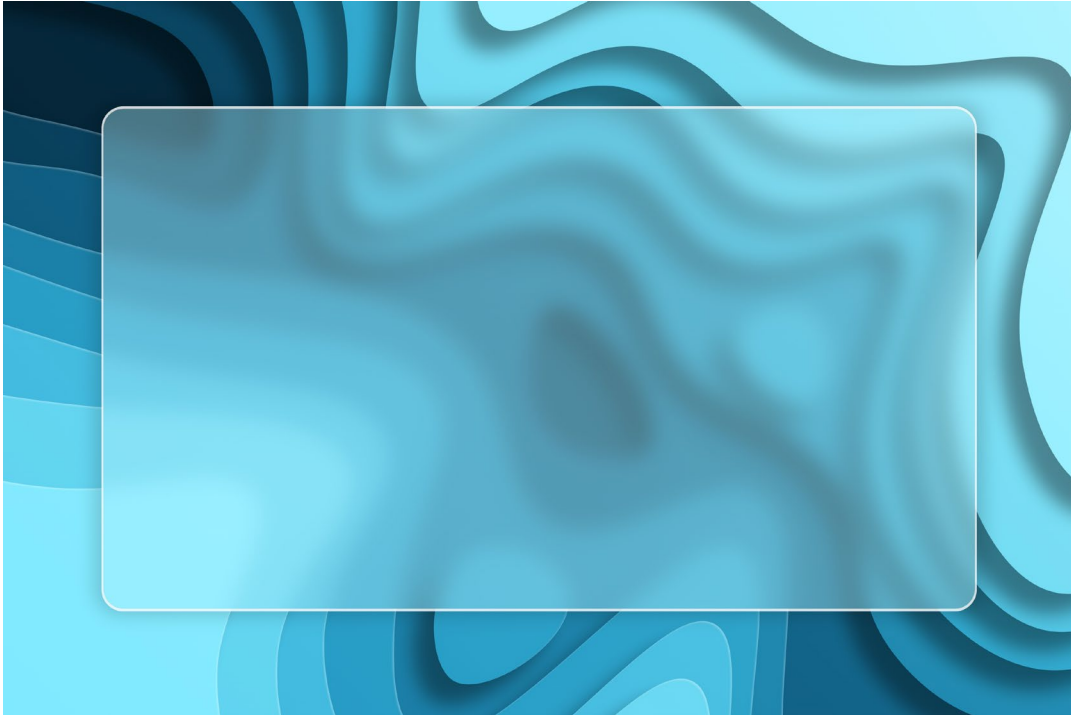
Jaime Short  
Water Resources Section Manager  
Eastern Regional Office





# Groundwater Management in the Pasco Basin Subarea





# What is a groundwater subarea?

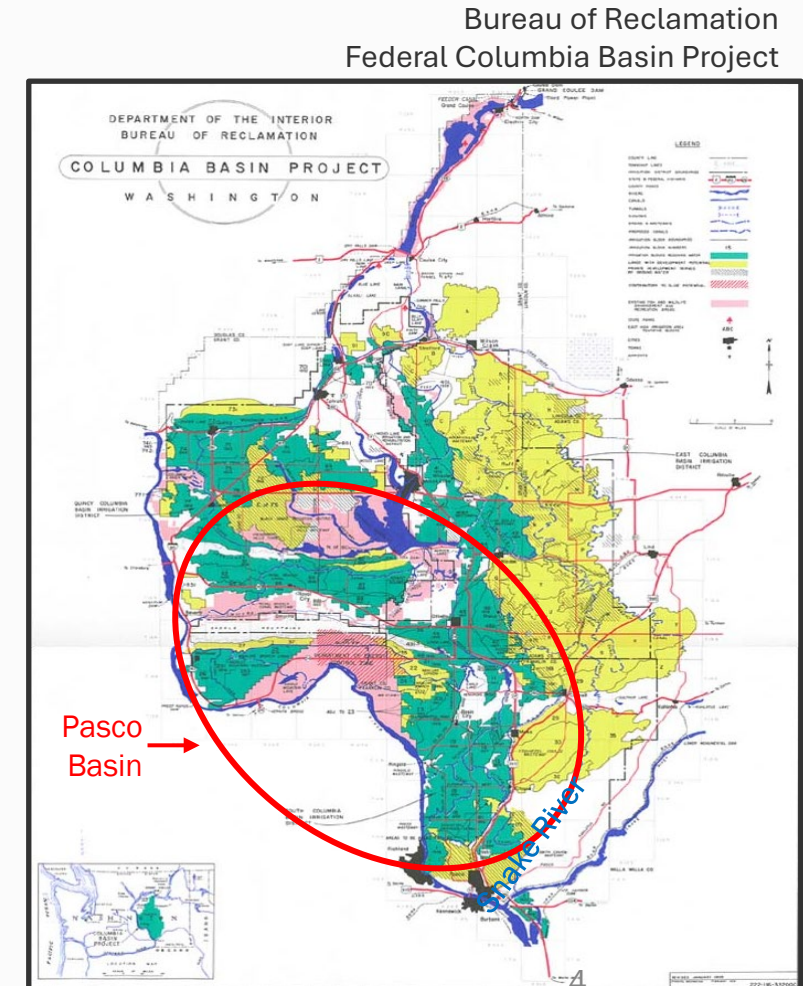
RCW 90.44.130

**“the department shall have authority... to designate groundwater areas or subareas, to designate separate depth zones within any such area or subarea, or to modify the boundaries of such existing area, or subarea, or zones to the end that the **withdrawals** therefrom may be administratively controlled...”**

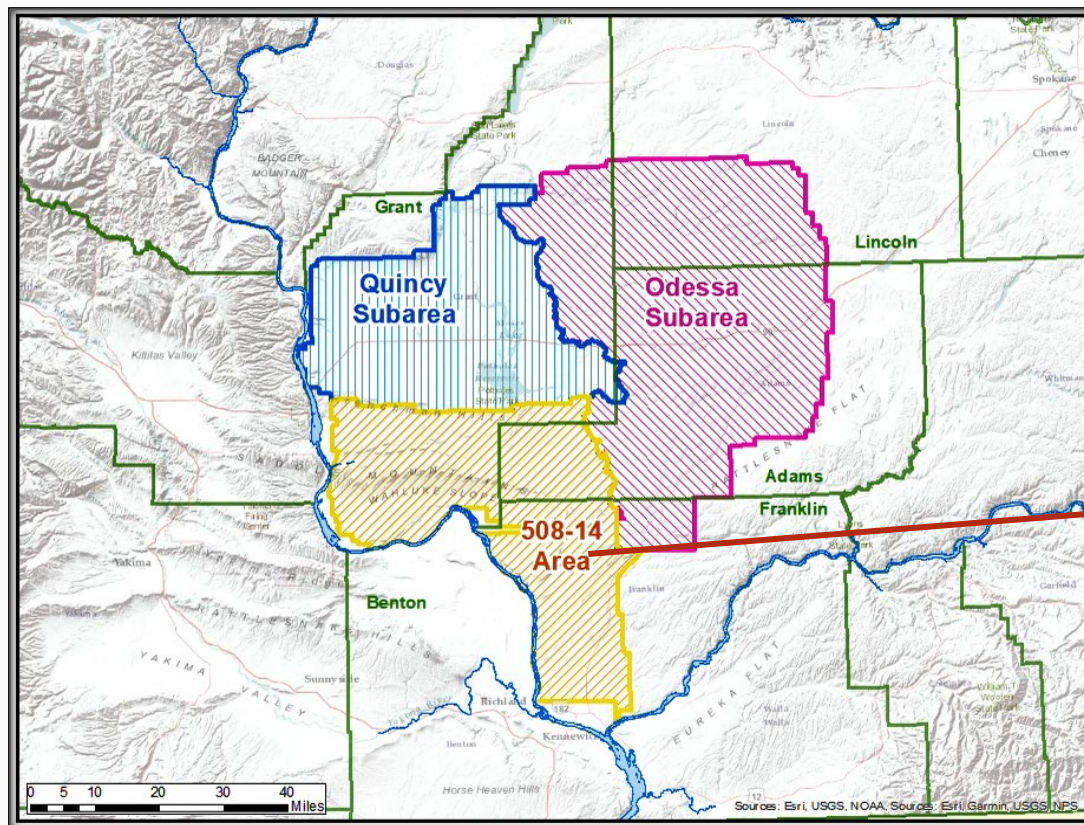
**“Each such subarea may be so designated as to enclose all or any part of a distinct body of public groundwater, as the department deems will most effectively accomplish the purposes of this chapter.”**

# Big Picture: Columbia Basin Project Irrigation

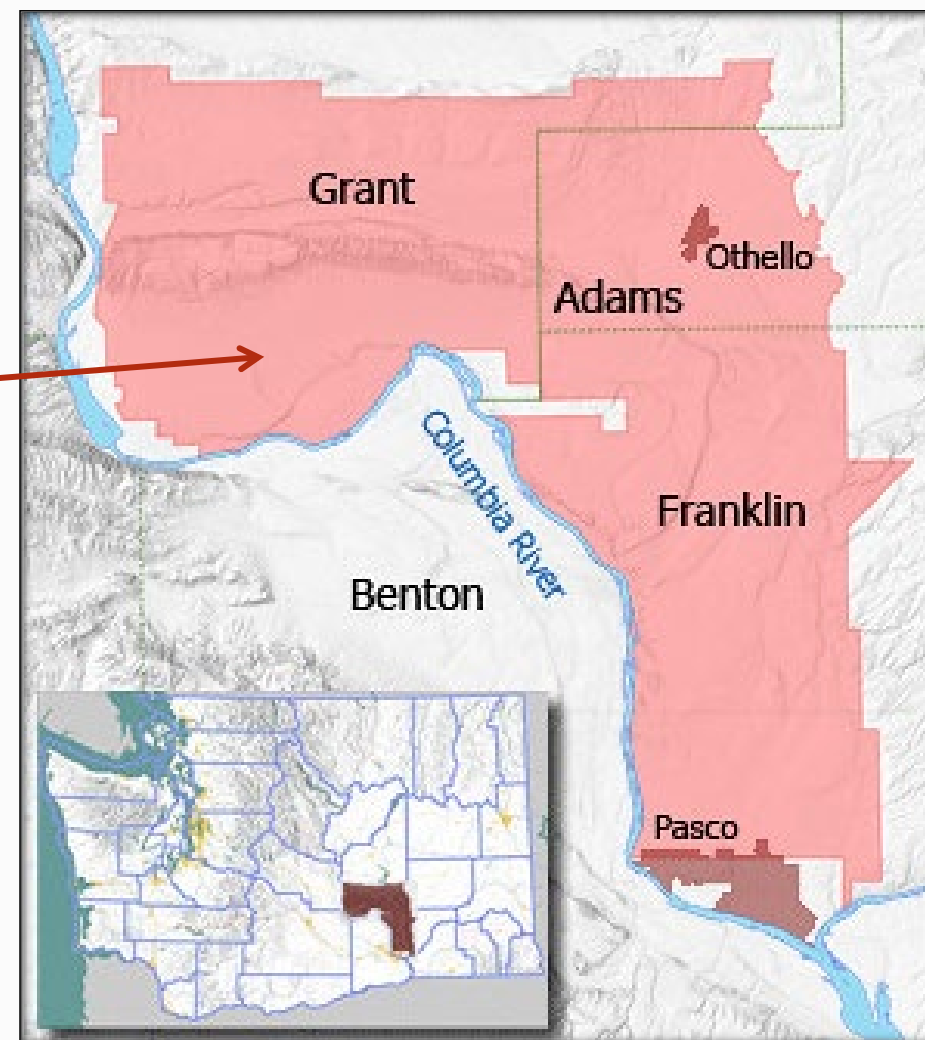
- Columbia Basin Act – early 1940s
- Return flows commingled with natural groundwater
- State withdrew groundwater in coordination with Reclamation, 508-14 WAC



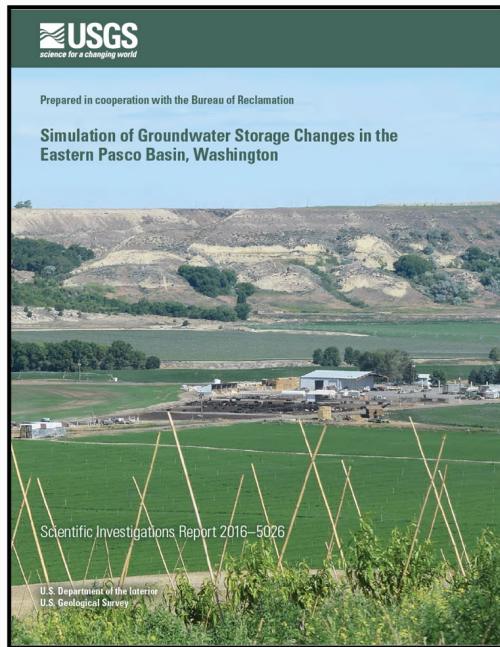
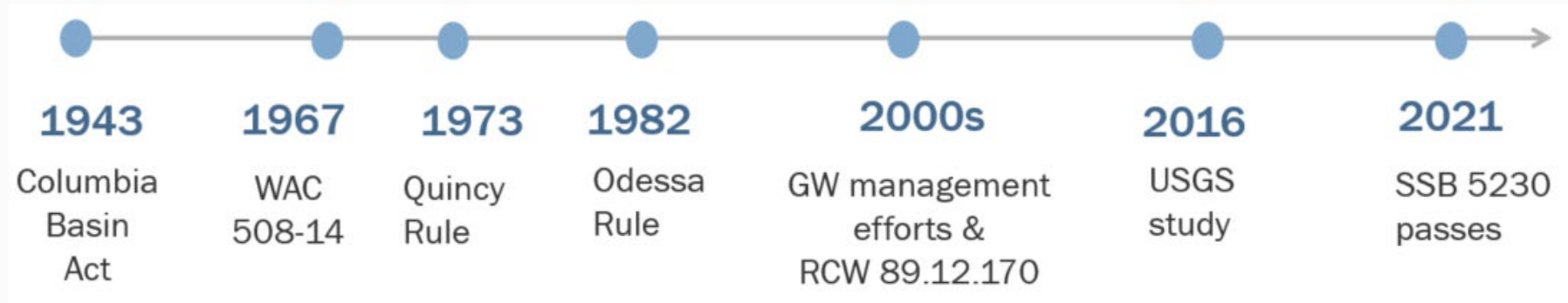




## Pasco Basin Management Area



# Pasco Basin History



- 2016 USGS Report
- Increase in Groundwater Storage
- Model Updates/Revisions
- Management Scenarios

# Pasco Basin History: 2021 Legislative Amendment

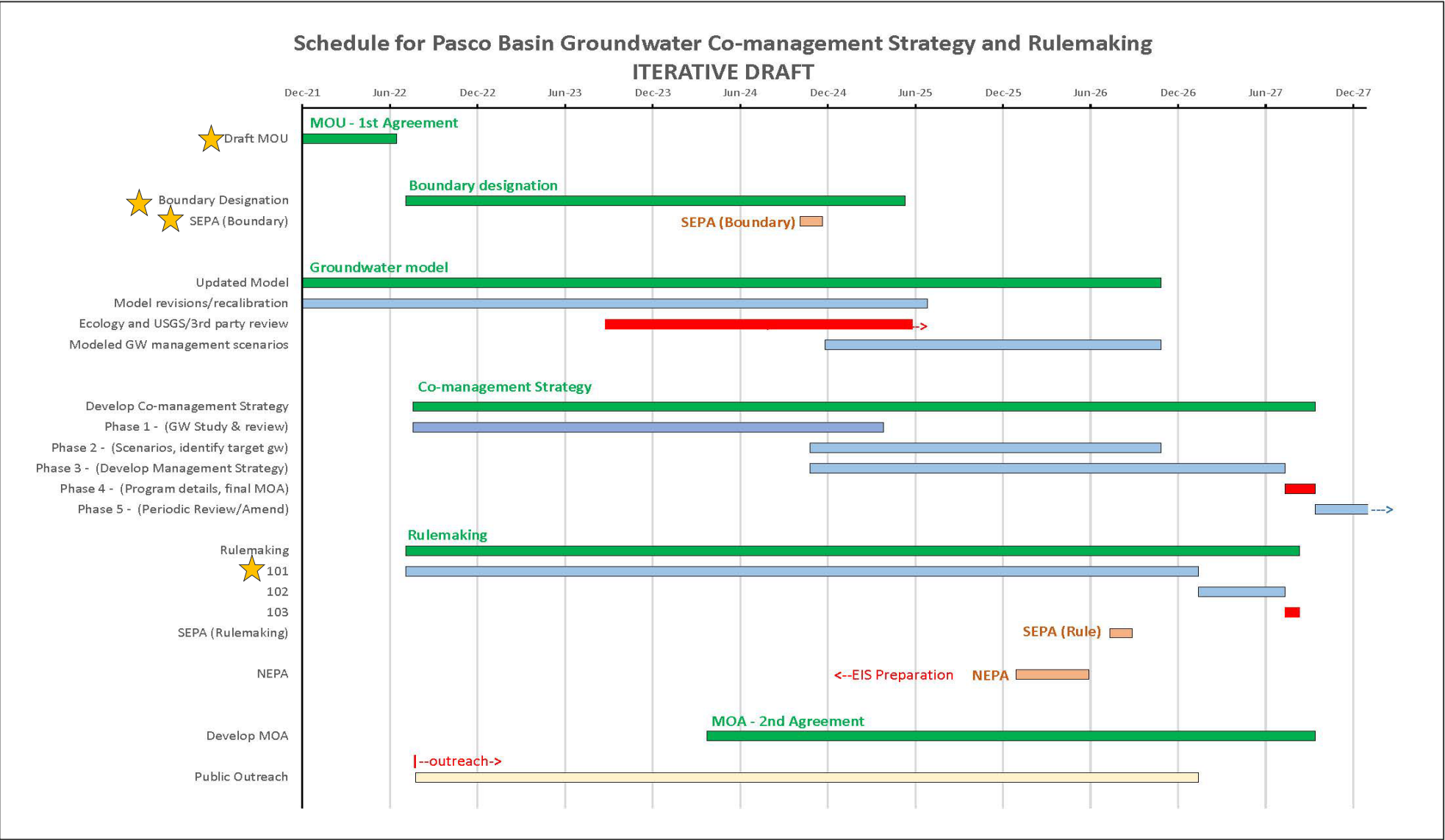


**Allocation through agreement** of groundwater resulting from Columbia Basin Project

**Clarify process** with subarea boundary designation under RCW 90.44.130

Directs Ecology to conduct **rulemaking**, includes outreach

# Draft Schedule





# Memorandum of Understanding

Signed in June 2022

Agreement between Reclamation and Ecology  
to pursue groundwater co-management  
strategy

Focus on public involvement and outreach

Outlines foundational steps for future  
groundwater management

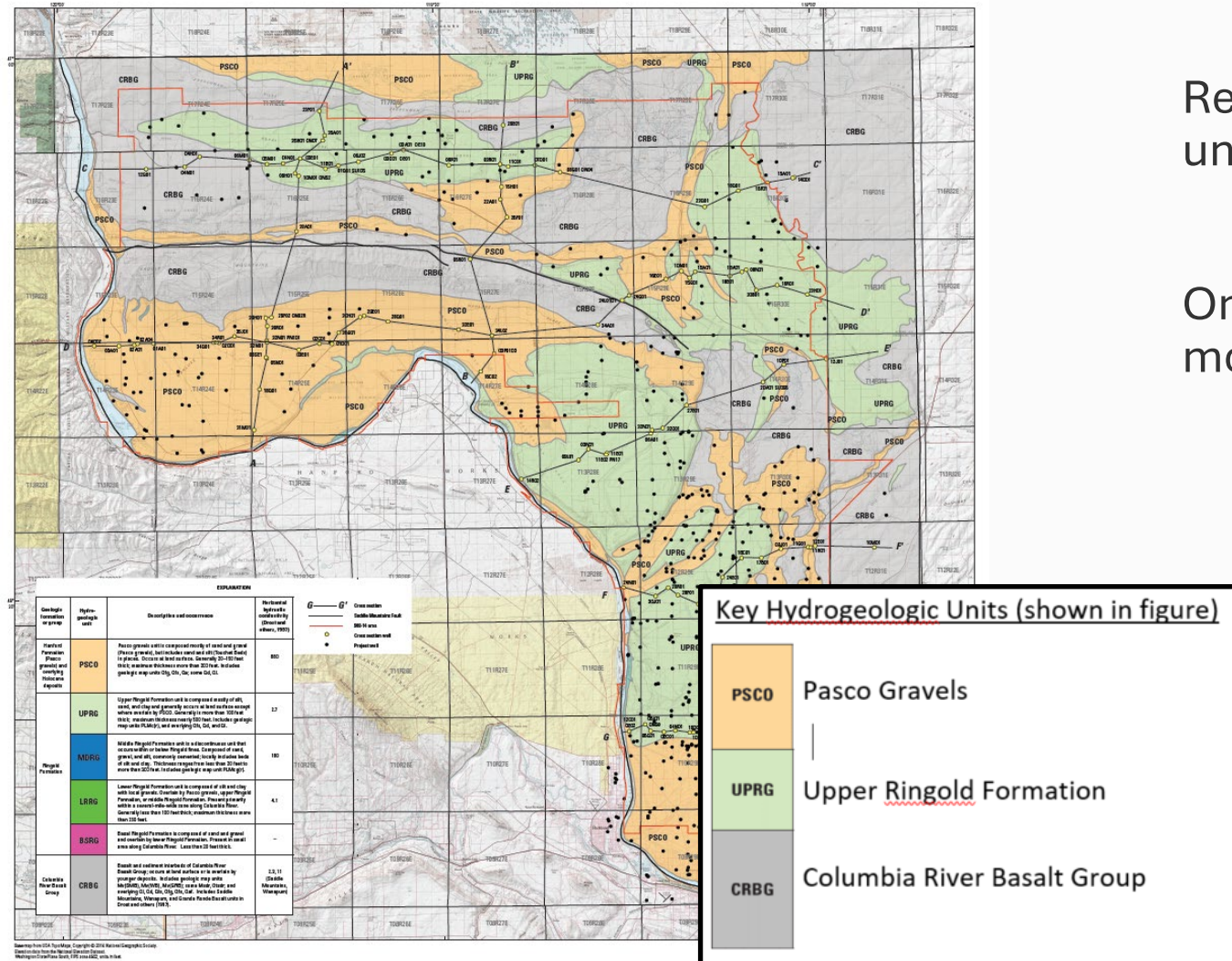


# USGS Study and Groundwater Model Updates

Revisions and recalibration  
underway to update model

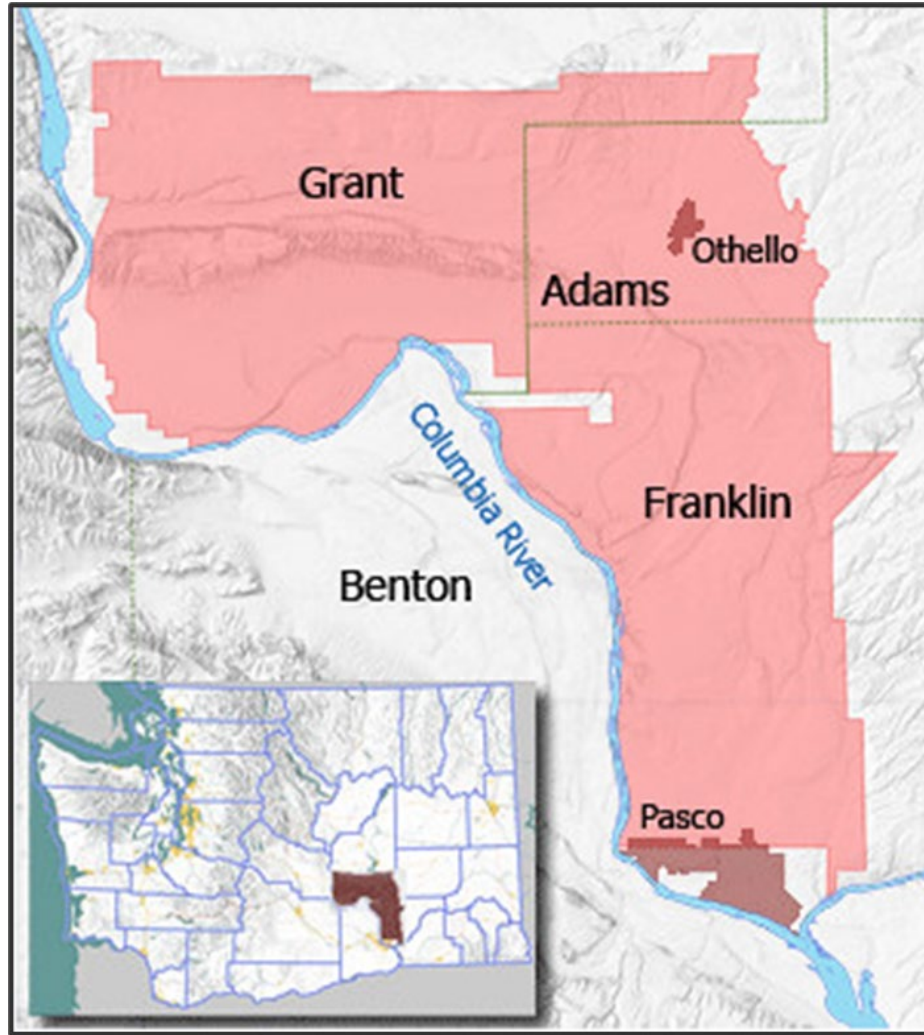
Ongoing: peer review and modeling scenarios

- Outlines 5 “buckets”
- Supports development of co-management strategy
- Inform groundwater allocation volumes and depths



[Excerpt copied from Heywood et al, 2016; USGS Scientific Investigations Report SIR2016-5026]





# Boundary Designation

- Designate external subarea boundary under RCW 90.44.130
- Process: public notices, Ecology findings, SEPA, and final Order
- Boundary defined by Order, management details will be in rule (WAC 173-135)
- Order issued **May 9, 2025**. It's official...again!

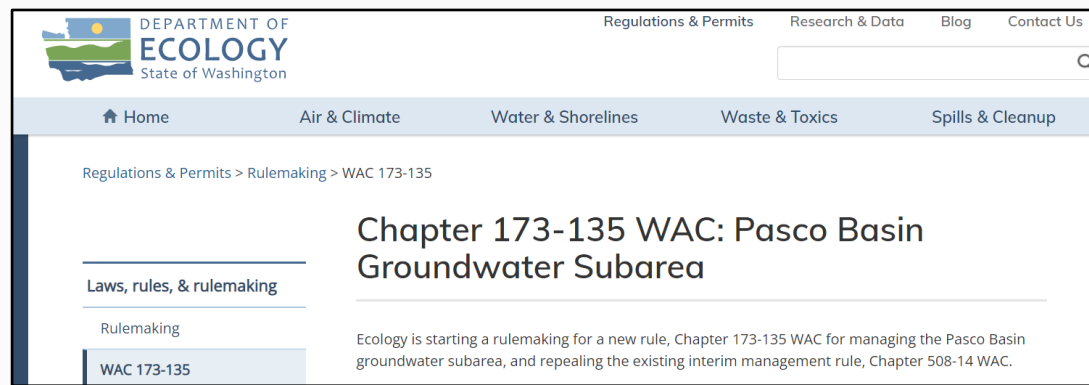
# Pasco Basin Rulemaking

## Chapter 173-135 WAC

RCW 89.12.170 directs Ecology to adopt a rule to implement the co-management agreement.

Rulemaking will result in a new rule Chapter 173-135 WAC and repeal of older interim rule Chapter 508-14 WAC.

Includes review under State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)



<https://ecology.wa.gov/Regulations-Permits/Laws-rules-rulemaking/Rulemaking/WAC-173-135>



# Pasco Basin Rulemaking

## Chapter 173-135 WAC



“CO-MINGLED” VS “STATE  
WATER”?



WHERE CAN THE WATER BE  
USED AND FOR WHAT?



HOW LONG SHOULD  
DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULES  
BE?



EQUIVALENT TO THE  
GROUNDWATER  
EXEMPTION?

Questions remain. Participate in the rulemaking process and help us craft the answers!

<https://ecology.wa.gov/Regulations-Permits/Laws-rules-rulemaking/Rulemaking/WAC-173-135>





# Thank you!

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**509-990-7636**