

# Kittitas County’s Proposed 2024 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 2024 drought needs.

On April 16, 2024 the Department of Ecology issued a drought emergency for Washington State. The Bureau of Reclamation’s May update to the Total Water Supply Available (“TWSA) lowered the proration rate to 54% from 63%.

## 2024 Water Right Holdings

Kittitas County has identified 140.987 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 for domestic use. The quantity of available water also excludes: 1) 800 AF-CU managed for “back mitigation” of historic water uses, and 2) 10 AF-CU associated with the 2023 drought-year lease for Zirkle Fruit (50 AF-CU was leased in 2023 and Kittitas County is allocating 10 AF-YR for a 5-year period to cover this lease. is excluded from the proposed potential 2024 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 of un-allocated water in Kittitas County’s water right portfolio.

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 <sup>1</sup>	23.783	13.373
1871	Manastash Creek	Williams <sup>2</sup>	14.138	10.632
1874	Manastash Creek	Amerivest <sup>3</sup>	67.203	45.571
1886	Coleman Creek	Schnebly <sup>4</sup>	264.21	71.411
<b>Total Quantity of Water Available in 2024 (AF CU)</b>				<b>140.987</b>

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 proposes to make 120 AF-CU available through a public auction process**, targeting emergency well users. The quantity proposed for lease through auction accounts for the requirement to manage 20% of the leased amount over a 5-year period to address delayed impacts associated with groundwater use. We are also reserving water to cover planned irrigation required for cottonwood forest

<sup>1</sup> CS4-01676sb5d@3b(B) and CS4-01676sb5d@2b(B)

<sup>2</sup> CS4-01553sb11a(B)

<sup>3</sup> CS4-01968sb11a

<sup>4</sup> CS4-02064sb10 84434

restoration in 2025 and to reserve water for new domestic uses through our standard mitigation program. 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.

If there is not a need for the County's water to provide mitigation for emergency well use, given the State's mitigation program, we propose to make 135 acre-feet of consumptive use water available for lease to an existing surface water user. More water would be available for lease because we do not have the need to reserve water for a 5-year period.