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**Testimony for the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on Status of Drought Conditions in Washington State**

Washington State is experiencing record low snowpack in the mountains this year. Current snowpack levels are 9 percent of normal, the lowest on record in the state.

With this very low snowpack, rivers with record low flows, and irrigation districts cutting off water to farmers, on May 15<sup>th</sup> Governor Jay Inslee declared a statewide drought for Washington.

Our upstream neighbor to the east, the State of Idaho has declared drought in five counties in the south central and eastern portions of the state due to low snowpack, below normal river forecasts.

Similarly, to the south of us, the State of Oregon has declared drought in 15 of 36 counties. Oregon's snowpack situation is even more dire than Washington States.

State law allows Ecology to declare a drought emergency if all or part of a geographical area is suffering from drought conditions. This is done with the written approval of the Governor.

Washington has a legal definition of drought. It requires that two conditions be met. The two conditions are:

- An area has to be experiencing or projected to experience a water supply that is below 75 percent of normal, and
- Water users within those areas will likely incur undue hardships as a result of the shortage.

**Categories of Concern**

With the statewide drought declaration and subsequent order relief can be provided for those experiencing hardships and to boost stream flows for fish.

Depending on how much funding is available from the Washington State Legislature, support may be provided for several activities including:

- Ensuring Reliable Public Water Supplies
- Aiding State Agriculture
- Protecting Fish and our Natural Resources

## **Current conditions**

### ***Agriculture***

Dismal snowpack and low stream flows in many areas around the state, particularly in the Yakima Basin -- where the Bureau of Reclamation has built multiple storage projects -- means less water is available for junior water right holders.

Difficult decisions are being made about what crops get priority water and how best to save fish.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture anticipates \$1.2 billion in crop loss this year.

Last week we issued approximately 25 drought well permits with approximately 25 more expected to be issued this year to members of the Roza Irrigation District. Emergency drought dollars will cover the cost of mitigation for these permits.

The “mitigation program” has been developed in cooperation with watershed partners in the Yakima including the Yakama Indian Nation and the Bureau of Reclamation. We have a plan in place to offset the impacts of these wells on instream flows by acquiring water rights from senior water right holders who are willing to fallow their lands.

In the Wenatchee Basin, Little Spokane Basin and in other watersheds, we have sent out curtailment orders to junior water users who must stop diverting water when instream flows are not met.

In the Walla Walla we are actively working with irrigators, tribes, and other water managers to develop leases and provide pulse flows to aid the upstream migration of salmon, steelhead and bull trout to more abundant, cooler waters.

### ***Communities***

The large municipalities of Seattle, Tacoma, and Everett have all indicated they will not experience water shortages this summer. These utilities have taken proactive steps to store rain water that fell this winter. They are projected to be able to meet their demand this year and not harm fish and wildlife because of their proactive management of water.

While many large water systems in the state have enough groundwater or reservoir storage to meet their customer needs and still meet instream flow agreements, other utilities, particularly smaller community systems may experience problems.

Drought response funding from the state legislature will allow communities to rehabilitate or deepen a well, or construct an intertie with an adjacent water system. These projects take time, and having funding earlier allows communities to complete their projects before conditions get to the point of crisis, later on in the summer and fall.

For example in the 2005 drought we provided funding to the City of Goldendale to deepen their municipal supply well and we provided funding to the Stevens County PUD and the Pend Oreille County PUD for developing interties to allow for more flexibility in water delivery.

### ***Flows for Fish***

For the Dungeness River on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington we have committed to 13 lease agreements to fallow about 1000 acres, which will result in 6 to 7 cubic feet per second more water during the critical late summer period.

We are also in the process of leasing water for flow enhancement from the Kittitas Reclamation District for sensitive tributaries in the Yakima Basin that are being impacted severely by this year's drought.

Right now in the Walla Walla, water supplies and flows are extremely low which is impacting fish passage and irrigation withdrawals.

Water is being shifted from creek to creek to keep water flowing for steelhead, Chinook and bull trout. In addition, we are working with water right holders to release pulse flows that provide sufficient flow for fish to move past these barriers, both upstream and downstream and the Umatilla Tribe is trapping hauling fish upstream to areas of cooler water.

Elsewhere, most of the serious impacts to fish and wildlife will happen in the summer and fall when flows drop even more.

### **Innovative Water Management**

#### ***Partnerships***

Key to the successful implementation of emergency drought response in Washington is the work we have done actively developing collaborative partnerships in many of the key watersheds in the states such as the Yakima, the Walla Walla, and the Dungeness.

The partnerships include tribes, local, state, and federal government and other water interests. This is a new way of doing business where irrigators support fish passage projects and fish interests support water supply projects. From these partnerships we have developed minimum flow requirements, flexible mitigation strategies, and lease arrangements to move water around quickly where and when it is needed.

#### ***Yakima Integrated Strategy***

In the Yakima basin, partners have developed leasing arrangements to share water among irrigation districts and provide water for stream flow while land lies fallow. In addition all parties including the Yakama Tribe have agreed to a flexible approach for mitigation when drought wells are in operation rather than having the full amount of mitigation water up front and in play when the wells are turned on.

The Yakima Integrated Strategy, which is Phase 3 of the Yakima River Water Enhancement Project, was developed working closely with partners. When funded it will expand the reservoir capacity in the Yakima basin, improve facility operations, and improve fish passage and fish habitat. The Integrated Strategy will provide enhanced storage, improved operations, and improved habitat in the Yakima providing more water during periods of drought.

### ***Dungeness***

In the Dungeness watershed, the Dungeness Irrigator's Association has agreed to voluntarily reduce their water diversions during periods of low flows even though their water rights allow them to take more water. These irrigators are also entering into lease agreements so water can be left in stream during critical seasons.

### ***Walla Walla***

In the Walla Walla, irrigators, tribes, all levels of government are actively moving water around to protect the fishery and ensure use for irrigation.

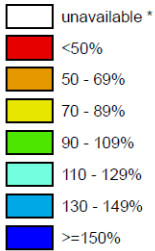
### ***Office of Columbia River***

Since 2006 we have developed more than 300,000 acre-feet of water from the Columbia River for improved flows for fish and additional water for municipal and agricultural use through enhanced reservoir management and improved irrigation efficiency. This new water will be very important during times of drought.

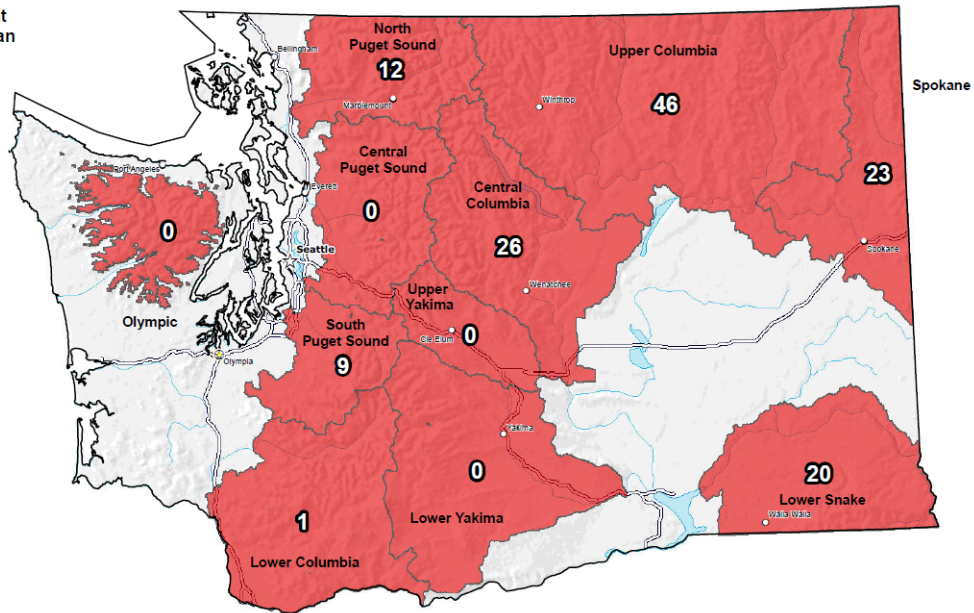
## Washington SNOTEL Current Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) % of Normal

May 28, 2015

Current Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) Basin-wide Percent of 1981-2010 Median



\* Data unavailable at time of posting or measurement is not representative at this time of year



Provisional Data  
Subject to Revision



The snow water equivalent percent of normal represents the current snow water equivalent found at selected SNOTEL sites in or near the basin compared to the average value for those sites on this day. Data based on the first reading of the day (typically 00:00).



Prepared by:  
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Olympic National Park, Hurricane Ridge Mon Apr 27 2015 PST Time 11:11 Elevation 5,242  
See "<http://www.nwac.us/weatherdata/hurricaneridge/now/>" for Weather

