

# PUD agreement could break water rights gridlock

by K.C. Mehaffey | Aug. 24, 2017, 7:05 p.m.  
PUD

## MORE INFO

### Wondering about Lake Chelan's water?

Lake Chelan water facts (in acre feet per year)

65,000 Total Lake Chelan water reserve

12,000 Water rights issued before 1925

41,723 Water rights allocated from 1925 through 2014

5,989 Water claims and other refinements

5,288 Water remaining for allocation

0.5 to 1 Enough water for a suburban home

— Source: Aspect Consulting LLC.

CHELAN — The Chelan County PUD is close to a deal with the state Department of Ecology that would free up an estimated 5,288 acre feet per year of water rights for new development throughout the Lake Chelan basin.

The proposed agreement with Ecology establishes the framework for calculating future water allocations that have been delayed for years because of Ecology's workload, and uncertainty over how much water is available. The water could be used for homes, vineyards, orchards, resorts or other uses.

"You can't really say how far that water will or will not go," said Marcie Clement, the PUD's water resources program manager. Estimates show a typical suburban home uses one-half to one acre foot per year.

While Ecology is in charge of allocating the water, the PUD holds a water right to generate power, and has agreed to make 65,000 acre feet per year available for other uses. To maintain its water right, the PUD must adhere to its federal license requirements for the Lake Chelan Dam, which includes keeping the lake at specific elevation levels and providing downstream flows for fish.

The proposed agreement would use findings agreed to by the PUD and Ecology that show that almost 92 percent of the water is allocated, leaving about 5,288 acre feet per year for new uses.

"Although Lake Chelan is a large reservoir, allowing additional consumptive water use from Lake Chelan could impair Chelan PUD's ability to meet its power generation and license obligations," Trevor Hutton, a water resources manager for the state Department of Ecology, said in an email.

PUD commissioners heard from Hutton, Dan Haller of Aspect Consulting and their own staff about the proposed new agreement earlier this month, and could approve the proposed agreement at their next meeting on Sept. 5.

For the PUD, the agreement would protect its existing hydro generation water right needed to operate the Lake Chelan Dam, and continue the utility's commitment to leave water for other sources.

Those water rights are allocated by the state Department of Ecology, which, through the proposed agreement, would establish and implement a system to track how much water is allocated, and how much is left for new water rights.

The 5,288 acre feet per year that's left for new water rights is a conservative estimate, and includes nearly 6,000 acre feet per year in water claims and other possible allocations.

But once the full 65,000 acre feet per year is allocated, Ecology cannot issue any new water permits out of the Lake Chelan water reserve, Hutton wrote in the email.

People who want to apply for new rights after that can still buy or transfer existing rights for their projects. And, on a regional basis, entities like the Lake Chelan Watershed Planning Unit can explore ways to augment or extend the reserve, through things like water banking, storage, or conservation, he wrote.

The good news: "The agreement will allow us to allocate water in a basin that has many pending applications," he added.

Clement said the PUD's main objectives are to establish a method for figuring out what's left, clarify the process for allocating those rights, and create an annual process to review and account for the allocated water.

In the proposed agreement, the utility has agreed on a method and reporting process for the reserve, and on the estimate of water remaining in the reserve. Future allocations from the reserve will include groundwater allocations, she noted.

The agreement also would help clarify the water that can be used in the Lake Chelan Water Basin, establish a way to track additional water, and offer an annual account of the allocated water, Clement noted, whereas allocations prior to 2014 did not include the exempted groundwater wells, or claims.

Hutton added that the agency is in the early stages of setting up a coordinated cost-reimbursement project with Chelan County, similar to one underway in the Wenatchee Basin, for moving forward with allocating new rights in the Lake Chelan basin.

K.C. Mehaffey: 997-2512

mehaffey@wenatcheeworld.com

---

Reach K.C. Mehaffey at 509-997-2512 or [mehaffey@wenatcheeworld.com](mailto:mehaffey@wenatcheeworld.com). Read her blog [An Apple a Day](#). follow her on Twitter at [@KCMehaffeyWW](#).