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## Finding water to Restore Steam Flows

Adelsman

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Abstract  
UCOWR Conference  
Finding Water to Restore Stream Flows

Hedia Adelsman

In many watersheds in Washington state, current water conditions are simply too poor to sustain most life stages of fish. Water withdrawals, impoundments, and land use changes have caused extremely low flows in more than a dozen river drainage systems. In those watersheds with chronic low-flow conditions, the most important and immediate need is to put water back into rivers and streams to help fish recovery. This emphasis on getting more actual “wet” water back in streams has been expressed by the state Legislature through passage of several key provisions and funding to the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) to acquire water rights on a voluntary basis and hold that water in trust to increase stream flows for fish.

Getting real water through water right acquisitions proved to be effective in keeping many streams and rivers flowing in late summer and early fall during the last three irrigation seasons. Ecology has invested \$4.1 million to keep thousands of acre-feet of water in streams in five river basins where fish populations are most at risk.

Washington Water Acquisition Program is an innovative and strategic approach that is implemented based on: 1) the status of instream flows and water rights in each watershed; 2) where, when and quantity of water needed to most effectively increase fish production; 3) opportunities for restoring flows via water rights acquisition; 4) level of community support; and 5) need to ensure public monies are used effectively and efficiently.

In order maximize expertise and keep duplication to a minimum, Ecology has been working in partnership with local watershed groups; a number of state agencies, federal entities such as the Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), local conservation districts, and private organizations such as Washington Water Trust and Walla Walla Watershed Alliance. For example, Ecology in partnership with the Bureau, BPA and Washington Water Trust entered into 57 water-right lease agreements with farmers and irrigators in the Columbia, Dungeness, Methow, Walla Walla and Yakima River basins.

Finally, since millions of dollars of state and federal funds are expected to be spent on water rights acquisitions, to be confident that water acquisition investments ultimately help fish populations by putting water back in areas where it is needed most we have put in place a compliance and monitoring program to protect acquired water and evaluate the effectiveness of acquisition activities over time.

The presentation will be given by Hedia Adelsman, Executive Policy Advisor with Ecology. Ms Adelsman has an extensive experience in natural resources policy and management, with focus on water resources.

