



CLEAN, FLOWING WATERS FOR WASHINGTON

The Center for
Environmental Law & Policy

Washington's Water Data and Preparing for an Uncertain Future

Water data and analysis play a crucial role in the development, supply, and management of surface and groundwater resources.

Water data are essential for:

- 1) Designing infrastructure;
- 2) Describing the state of the resource;
- 3) Enabling the assessment of risks; and
- 4) Evaluating management decisions and policy implementation.

Quantifying risks emerging from growing water stress is critical, particularly given our changing climate. Put simply, good water data and analysis are required to recover salmon and support a healthy economy.

The Department of Ecology is the primary state agency responsible for collecting water quantity and quality data. Ecology has done a good job making water right information, well drilling reports and water quality data available for academic and public use. However, that data has limited utility for understanding existing use and projecting future water supply. To ensure that adequate water is available for both consumptive out of stream uses and sufficient instream flows, new data and platforms for dissemination are needed. A comprehensive, linked tool to use data held by cities, counties, utilities, irrigation districts, and other entities (e.g., academia) combined into an integrated data and information platform is essential to move water management forward.

Significant water resource data is currently collected and held by cities, counties, utilities and irrigation districts across Washington. A first start is to aggregate existing water data that is now scattered across various institutions in a way that ensures that the data can be used. The data needs to be readily accessible and understandable to the public. Water, after all, is a critically important public resource.

Water Data Proviso

\$2,000,000* of the climate investment account—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 and \$1,000,000* of the climate investment account for fiscal year 2026 is provided for the Department of Ecology to develop a comprehensive and operational, web-based tool for hosting water resource data on surface, groundwater, and precipitation into a statewide, geospatial data portal that is compatible with the USGS NWIS. The department shall consult with local and tribal governments to identify the most useful data elements and analytics to incorporate climate change impacts in local and regional planning. The Department shall obtain water data held by cities, counties, utilities, irrigation districts, water banks, water conservation districts, academic institutions, federal government, and other entities as well as request data from Federally recognized Tribes for water resource data on surface, groundwater, and precipitation. The data collection, dissemination and analytical tools shall address state and local government data needs regarding climate change, local water resource risks, resilience planning and analysis. The portal shall provide the public with an interactive online mapping system focused on water resource data that enables users to access, visualize, and consume improved water data.

The Department shall provide a progress report to the relevant legislative committees, the public and the Office of the Governor quarterly with a final report due by December 31, 2026, on the development of the data platform, data sharing agreements, and the cost of operation. Completion date of the project by December 31, 2027.

*Budget number are an estimate and may need to be increased to make sure Ecology has the funds to implement the proviso.