



To Protect and Promote the Health and the Environment of the People of Kittitas County

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Kittitas County to Lease Water Rights to Irrigators in Drought Response**

This year's Yakima Basin water supply is expected to be insufficient to meet water needs. The Bureau of Reclamation's [June 2019 Total Water Supply Available forecast](#) for the Yakima Basin indicated that water supply will fully satisfy senior water rights, but junior and proratable water rights will receive an estimated 74 percent of their supply this irrigation season. On April 4, Governor Inslee declared a drought emergency in the Upper Yakima River watershed, and on May 20th this declaration was extended to the entire Yakima Basin. As a result, some irrigators in the Yakima Basin will not receive enough water to irrigate a full season this year.

During times of drought, water leases can help solve critical water needs by transferring water to these areas allowing irrigators to operate for the entire season. Kittitas County currently holds over 157 acre-feet of consumptive-use water that could be made available this year through leasing agreements. The water was purchased through local funds to be used in the Kittitas County Water Mitigation and Metering Program (KCWMMP) for future domestic uses associated with building permits. However, this water will not be needed through 2019. As a result, county officials are working to make this water available now for access to irrigators. Cory Wright, Kittitas County Commissioner, commented, "This water, which is banked for a future purpose, can be offered in the present to assist our local farmers and industry and ensure their 2019 growing season is a successful one."

Kittitas County is uniquely equipped to respond to drought conditions as water rights currently held by the County are readily available for mitigation due to their status in the State Trust Water Rights Program. The program makes them suitable for use in much of the Yakima basin with clearly-identified suitability maps, and the quantity of water available for transfer has been approved by the Department of Ecology. Commissioner Wright applauded the process leading up to this sale by explaining, "County staff, in coordination with the Washington State Department of Ecology have produced a proactive response to the drought declaration and continue the collaborative approach our two organizations have built over the years. Because of this, Kittitas County is able to not only support our agricultural businesses, but also leverage holdings reserved for future use into revenue that will help our county taxpayers today."

Kittitas County will be holding a public auction to lease county water rights to eligible bidders on July 9<sup>th</sup> at 10am in the Board of County Commissioner's auditorium at 205 W 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Ellensburg. Staff will auction 25 (twenty five) acre-foot blocks of water at a minimum bid price of \$240 per acre-foot. Irrigators interested in bidding must complete an eligibility review as described in the public notice at <https://www.co.kittitas.wa.us/notices/default.aspx>

For more information, please contact the Kittitas County Public Health Department at 509-962-7515.

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