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Policy Statement on Ecology's Instream Flow Rules

- Setting an instream flow by rule does not by itself determine actual stream flows or improve aquatic habitat. Therefore, to achieve these goals, consideration must be given to water storage, conservation, and acquisition of water rights from willing sellers.
- Providing water supply for domestic use is required, without exception, notwithstanding that “overriding considerations of the public interest” may be used to allow domestic withdrawals to conflict with instream flows.
- Local governments must plan for and accommodate future growth. Instream flow rules must complement, not conflict with, local land use planning.
- The quantity of water in a domestic reservation must provide domestic water sufficient for build out based on comprehensive plans. The population projections provided by the Office of Financial Management to counties plus employment projections should be used to determine future water demands in areas not served by existing public water systems.
- Reservation water use accounting must reflect recharge and the importation of water into basins by deep wells or water system extension.
- While instream flow rules may vary based on specific local needs and conditions, water laws are statewide and must be consistently applied.
- Minimum instream flow levels should be a portion of actual flows, which have been described as “a limited portion of a stream’s natural flow” or “the smallest amount necessary” to protect actual instream uses.
- When the state adopts instream flow rules, it must also provide funding for key technical issues, including recharge percent, and determining extent and timing of hydraulic continuity. State funding is also needed for infrastructure to improve streamflows and to acquire water rights from willing sellers.