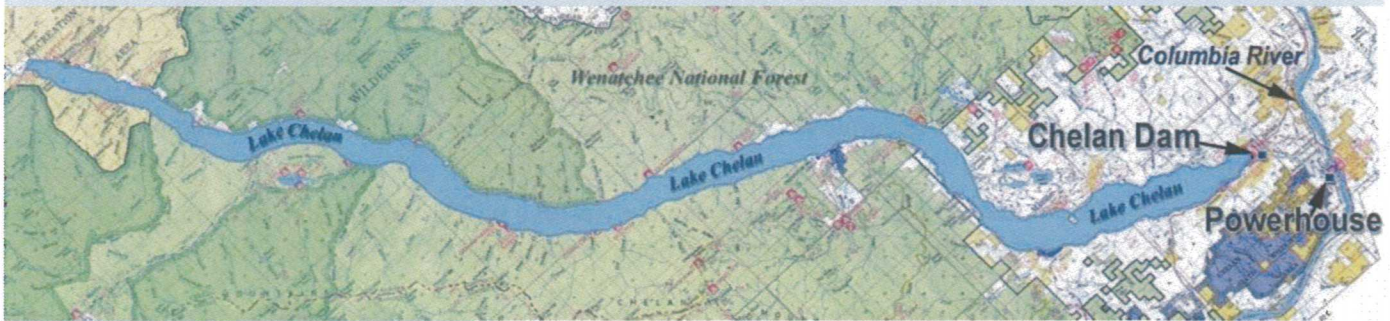


Focus on: Lake Chelan Reserve



More Information

Lake Chelan is located:

- In Chelan County, in north central Washington
- Within Watershed (WRIA) 47
- Within a 924-square-mile drainage area called the “Lake Chelan water basin” (see map on page 2)

The FERC license for the Chelan Project:

- Provides for impoundment of water behind Chelan Dam for hydropower generation by Chelan PUD
- Requires lake levels be maintained between 1079 and 1100 feet to support recreation, fisheries, and aesthetics

The Lake Chelan Reserve:

- Consists of 65,000 acre-feet of water per year for existing and future non-Project uses—with approximately 5,200 acre-feet/year remaining available as of August 2017

Contact information

Trevor Hutton, Section Manager
 509 454-4240

Trevor.Hutton@ecy.wa.gov

Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodation, call Ecology at 360-407-6872, 711 (relay service), or 877-833-6341.

Background

The Lake Chelan Hydroelectric Project, originally constructed by the Chelan Electric Company, currently is operated by Public Utility District No. 1 of Chelan County (Chelan PUD) under a license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Under state-issued 1925 water rights and a 1992 agreement with the Department of Ecology (Ecology), Chelan PUD holds the reservoir right to store water behind the Chelan dam and to use the entire flow of the Chelan River for hydropower generation, *except* for 65,000 acre-feet per year (afy) for existing and future domestic and irrigation uses in the Lake Chelan Water Basin. This 65,000 afy is frequently referred to as the Lake Chelan Reserve (Reserve). The 1992 Agreement between Ecology and Chelan PUD affirmed the 65,000-afy Reserve for non-project purposes, which was approved by FERC in 1993.

As of 2017, there are more than 150 applications on file for new surface or groundwater permits in the Lake Chelan water basin. In order to move forward on processing pending water right applications, Chelan PUD and Ecology entered into an Amendment of the 1992 Agreement to clarify and streamline the regulatory process for allocating water rights from the Reserve and a Memorandum of Understanding to establish accounting business rules to accurately estimate the amount of the Reserve remaining for allocation.

Resolving the Backlog

In 2014, Chelan County and Ecology launched a local Coordinated Cost-Reimbursement Program (Program) to allow processing of applications for new water right permits from the Reserve.

Under the Program, water right and water use information was compiled in an electronic database Reserve Accounting System. This Reserve Accounting System was updated by Ecology and Chelan PUD in 2017 during research to verify the available amount of water remaining. An estimated 5,200 acre-feet per year remain unallocated from the Reserve and available for new surface water right permits, new ground water permits, and permit-exempt groundwater uses authorized under RCW 90.44.050. The Reserve accounting will provide a transparent and more accurate accounting of water allocated from the Reserve, and will be updated at least annually.

Groundwater and surface water right permits issued from the Reserve will be allocated as secondary permits from the Lake Chelan Reservoir, in accordance with the State Water Code (RCW 90.03.370).

- Applicants wishing to take part in the Program must share the costs for investigating and processing applications for new water right permits.
- Prospective water users are not required to rely on the Reserve, and may choose instead to fully mitigate the impacts of their appropriations (for example, by acquiring and transferring existing water rights).

Meeting Future Needs

There is only a finite quantity of water in the Reserve, and the remaining amount may be insufficient to provide water to every applicant. When the water in the Reserve is fully allocated, Ecology cannot allow new permitted or permit-exempt uses to be debited against it.

Chelan PUD carefully manages the Lake Chelan Reservoir to generate power to meet obligations to its customer-ratepayers, and requirements of its FERC license requirements — including maintaining the lake within specific elevation levels and providing downstream flows for fish. 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.

However, individual applicants who desire new water supplies will remain free to acquire and/or transfer existing water rights for their projects. Also, on a regional scale, entities such as the Lake Chelan Watershed Planning Unit and the Office of Columbia River could explore means of augmenting or extending the Reserve, including water banking, storage, and conservation projects.

The Lake Chelan Water Basin

The original 1925 reservation applied to “lands bordering and near the lake.” The 1992 Agreement between Ecology and the Chelan PUD used WRIA 47 (shown outlined in orange) as a shorthand way to identify the Lake Chelan Water Basin. However, WRIA 47 includes small areas near the Columbia River that do not drain to Lake Chelan. The 2017 Amendment to the 1992 Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Ecology and Chelan PUD identify the area where water rights are included in the Reserve (shown outlined in blue) through a legal description and the map.

