

Answers to your questions about Washington State University's proposed water re-use facility

Presented by the Palouse Basin Aquifer Committee and its Citizens Advisory Group

In order to conserve the Palouse region's underground water supply, Washington State University is requesting \$16 million from the state of Washington to build a water re-use facility. The facility, operated in partnership with the city of Pullman, would irrigate WSU campus grounds with reclaimed water. Reclaimed water is the product of an advanced treatment system that would improve the quality of the treatment plant effluent so it is safe for recreational activities and irrigation. The water would be pumped to College Hill from the city's treatment plant on the South Fork of the Palouse River.

1. Why is it important to use reclaimed water at WSU?

Because doing so will help conserve water supplies for the Palouse region of Washington and Idaho. Despite conservation efforts, the level of the Grande Ronde Aquifer—from which WSU draws its water and upon which most of the region's 58,000 residents depend—has continued to decline.

2. Are there any other funding partners for the project?

The Washington Department of Ecology has approved a grant for up to \$1.5 million to support the project.

3. If approved by the 2009 Legislature, when would construction on the project begin, and when would it be completed?

Start of construction is anticipated in 2010, with completion in 2011.

4. Which parts of campus would be watered?

The golf course and university housing complexes along the Terre View Road corridor would be irrigated using only reclaimed water. As money becomes available to extend the distribution infrastructure, other areas would be irrigated with reclaimed water, such as lawns, university farm fields and orchards. There is also the possibility that reclaimed water could be used for the campus energy/steam plant and chilled water plant systems.

5. How much reclaimed water will be used for irrigation?

Up to 1.05 million gallons per day, mostly from May through September. Based on preliminary design calculations, approximately 148 million gallons per year would be used for irrigation. (In comparison, the nearby University of Idaho used 93 million gallons of reclaimed water to irrigate its grounds in 2007.)

6. Would the diversion of that much water from the South Fork of the Palouse River affect the rights of downstream water users?

No, according to a 2003 letter from the Washington State Department of Ecology.

7. Will any city property be irrigated with reclaimed water?

While the potential exists, there are no immediate plans to use WSU reclaimed water on city property.

8. Who would pay for maintenance of the re-use facility?

WSU has always contributed to the cost of operations and maintenance of the treatment plant. A similar arrangement with the city would cover the reclaimed water costs. A potential indirect benefit of the water re-use facility would be a head start on Pullman wastewater treatment plant improvements that may soon be required by law.

9. What would the length and location of the reclaimed water pipeline be?

The pipeline will be approximately 6 miles long and consist of a combination of 16” and 12” diameter pipe. It will go through the north end of Pullman, following Terre View Drive to the northeast quadrant of the campus where a new facility will be constructed to store reclaimed water. The reclaimed water distribution system will extend into campus from this facility.

10. Hasn't WSU asked for this money in the past?

The university made three previous requests for the project, but so far has received money only for preliminary design work, which was completed and approved by the Department of Ecology in 2002.

11. If the project isn't approved in 2009, what are the chances it will be built later?

Water planners see 2009 as a “window of opportunity” for the project that may close in the future. One reason is the expected imposition of minimum in-stream flows for the South Fork of the Palouse River.

12. If I want to speak up in support of the project, whom should I contact?

Those influencing the funding decision include: Gov. Christine Gregoire, PO Box 40002 Olympia, WA 98504-0002 (an e-mail address for the governor can be found online at <http://www.governor.wa.gov/contact>); 9th District legislators Rep. Steve Hailey, Rep. Joe Schmick, and Sen. Mark Schoesler; Rep. Helen Sommers, House Appropriations Committee Chair; and Karen Fraser, Capital Budget chair for the Senate Ways and Means Committee. Contact information for legislators can be found online at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rosters/>

13. Where can I get more information about the Palouse region's drinking supply?

A good place to start is the Web site of the Palouse Basin Aquifer Committee, www.webs.uidaho.edu/pbac/.