

New Dams in Alpine Lakes Wilderness?

By John Osborn, Water & Salmon Committee

A recent proposal for new dams in Washington State targets the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, specifically the Enchantments. The lakes proposed for dams and diversions include: Colchuck, Eightmile, Upper Klonauqua, Nada, Upper and Lower Snow, and Square. All seven flow to Icicle Creek.

The Office of Columbia River (OCR) was created in 2006 by the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) with the primary purpose of “aggressively pursuing development of water supplies” resulting in a series of proposals for new irrigation dams and reservoirs. Alpine Lakes Wilderness joins a growing list of proposed new dams and reservoirs on OCR’s list, including Bumping Lake and Lmuma Creek in the Yakima Basin, among many others.



Nonfunctional dam at Eightmile Lake in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Photo: Karl Forsgaard

Pressure to build dams in this area stems from a lawsuit brought by the City of Leavenworth against Ecology regarding quantification of the city’s water rights. The case is currently on hold in the court of appeals. Meanwhile, OCR has entered into a \$700,000 contract with Chelan County to form the Icicle Work Group (IWG), to address the issue of water resources for Leavenworth.

If the effort fails and the lawsuit moves forward, a court decision could undermine Ecology’s authority to quantify water rights that predate the 1917 water code. The state-wide implications are substantial.

In addition to finding water for Leavenworth, IWG goals include solving instream flow problems in Icicle Creek, making the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery sustainable, protecting tribal rights to fish at the Hatchery, improving water reliability for agriculture, and promoting ecosystem health. All this

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must occur while achieving compliance with state and federal laws, including the Wilderness Act—no small feat.

Questions have been raised about whether the IWG’s goals, including ecosystem benefits, can only be achieved if new water supply is provided for Leavenworth. This, in turn, raises questions about whether state and federal laws, such as, Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act permits, may be superseded by a stakeholder-based collaborative process.

Conservation Alternative

Water conservation opportunities are substantial in the Wenatchee River Valley. Rather than building new dams in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, many believe that the City

of Leavenworth and other water users should aggressively pursue water conservation. These actions, combined with promoting water markets that facilitate selling and trading

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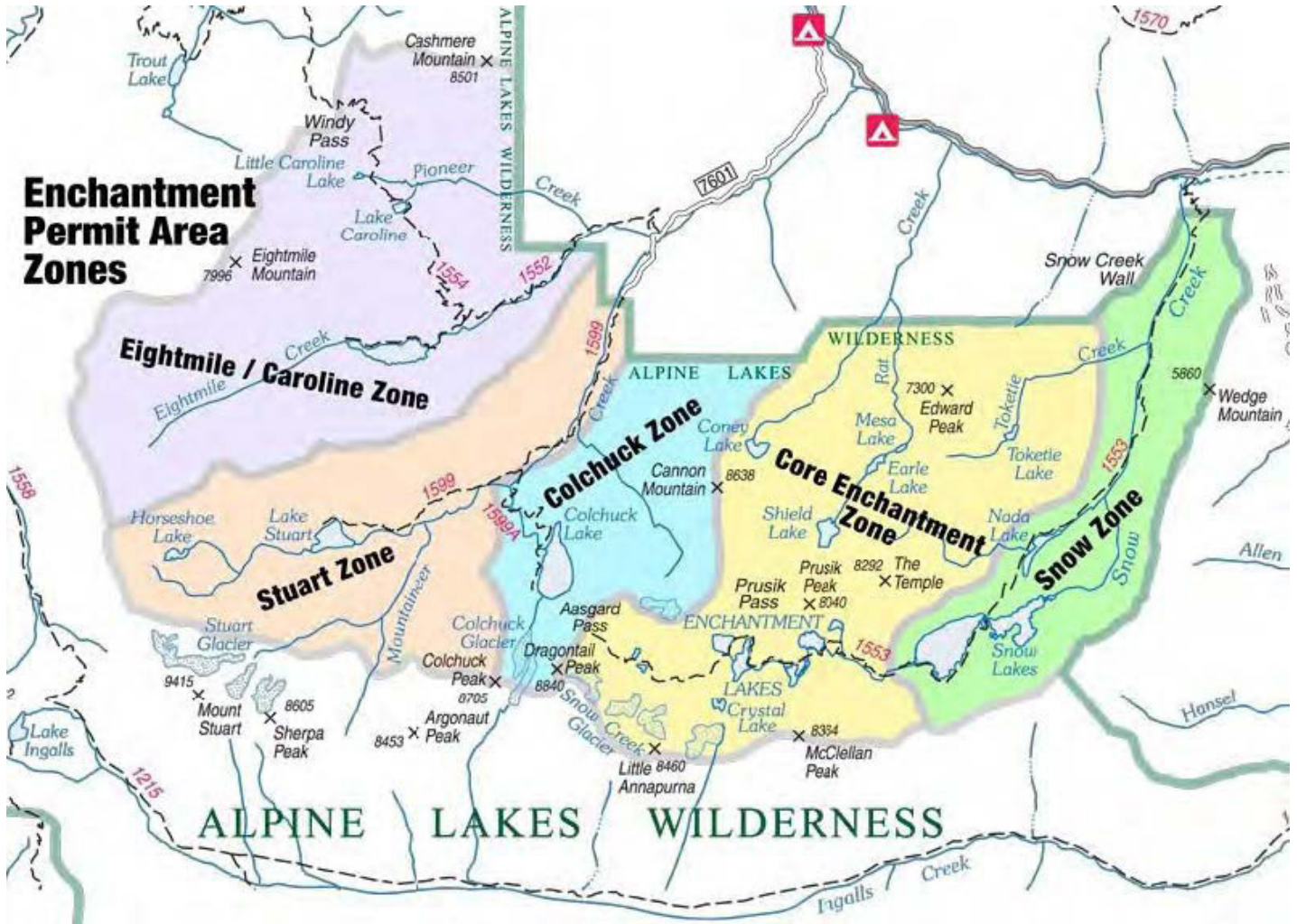
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water rights, could supply future water uses. To address the critical need to increase flows to Icicle Creek in the 6-mile stretch near Sleeping Lady Resort (just upstream of Leavenworth), the point of diversion for irrigation could be moved downstream to the Wenatchee River. This would add approximately 117 cubic-feet-per-second to Icicle Creek.

Because the state has invested so heavily in *supply-side* solutions to water scarcity—by creating and funding the OCR—water conservation and other *demand-side* solutions are generally disregarded. This threat to the Alpine Lakes

Wilderness is about water scarcity—a problem that may only be getting worse. Fundamental reforms in water management are needed in order for the Washington State government to fulfill its public trust duties on water.

To volunteer, contact Karl Forsgaard (National Forest Committee, karlforsgaard@comcast.net) or Elaine Packard (Water & Salmon Committee, espackard@msn.com). For more information, read the 4-part blog post in Naiads.wordpress.com by Rachael Paschal Osborn.



Alpine Lakes Wilderness - The Enchantments - where dams and diversions are proposed. Map: U.S. Forest Service