



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

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IN THE MATTER OF THE REQUEST FOR DESIGNATION OF LOWER YAKIMA VALLEY AS A GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT AREA PURSUANT TO CHAPTER 173-100 WAC	ORDER DESIGNATING THE LOWER YAKIMA VALLEY GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT AREA  DOCKET #8861
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To: Yakima County  
128 N. Second Street  
Yakima, WA 98901

### Background

Nitrate contamination of groundwater has been identified in the Lower Yakima Valley. The nitrate concentrations detected in groundwater indicate impact by human activity and are significant to human health.

Elevated nitrate levels in groundwater have been detected in numerous water quality investigations going back to the late 1980s. Concerned citizens and grass roots organizations called attention to the problem as early as 1997, and it was eventually brought to the attention of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

EPA facilitated a meeting in 2008, where EPA, state and local agencies and the public began to discuss how to address the issues. Several more meetings were subsequently held. In November of 2009, the Yakima Valley was designated as an EPA Environmental Justice Community. On January 25, 2010, EPA issued a finding in support of the use of the Safe Drinking Water Act, Section 1431, to address the contamination. EPA found that the groundwater in the Yakima Valley is an underground source of drinking water which is contaminated, and that this contamination may present an imminent and substantial endangerment to human health.

In February 2010, the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology), along with four county, state and federal agencies, published a report: *Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Quality Preliminary Assessment and Recommendations Document*. The report summarized the nitrate issue in the Lower Yakima Valley.

The report identified a number of options for addressing the elevated nitrate concentrations, including establishment of a Groundwater Management Area (GWMA). The Yakima County Commissioners expressed their intent to act as Lead Agency in identifying a Groundwater Management Area and developing a program.

On June 30, 2011, Yakima County submitted its request for identification of the Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area.



### Findings

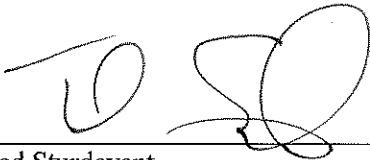
1. On July 11, 2011, Ecology accepted the request and appointed Yakima County as Lead Agency, pursuant to WAC 173-100-050(6).
2. Ecology held a public hearing on the requested designation of the Lower Yakima Valley as a Groundwater Management Area on August 30, 2011. The comments submitted at the hearings and written comments submitted during the subsequent public comment period, which ran from August 30, 2011, to September 22, 2011, have been considered by Ecology in processing the request for designation by Yakima County.
3. The planning boundary for the Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area shall be the Lower Yakima Valley from Union Gap to Benton City, excluding lands within the Yakama Reservation.
4. Ecology, in cooperation with Yakima County, intends to appoint a Groundwater Advisory Committee to oversee the development of a groundwater management program for the area, consistent with Chapter 173-100-090 Washington Administrative Code.
5. The Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area meets the guidelines and criteria of WAC 173-100-050(2) and (3).

### Order

Based upon the foregoing, Ecology designates the Lower Yakima Valley, encompassed within the boundaries delineated on the attached map, as the Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area. This Order is issued pursuant to RCW 90.44.400 and Chapter 173-100 WAC.

This Order is issued to Yakima County as Lead Agency, with copies to other affected state agencies, local governments, tribal governments, and members of the news media, as delineated in WAC 173-100-050(6).

**SIGNATURE**



Ted Sturdevant  
Director  
Washington State Department of Ecology

11-15-11

Date



# Boundaries of Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area

