



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WASHINGTON

Empowering all Washingtonians to engage in a more responsible and responsive democracy

## 2018 ISSUE PAPER – WATER SUPPLY AND QUALITY

### **LWVWA and LWVUS supporting positions:**

The LWVWA supports the “establishment and maintenance of minimum in-stream flows, as a public right.” The LWVUS supports policies that “reflect the interrelationships of water quality and quantity, groundwater and surface water and address the potential depletion or pollution of water supplies; and policies to achieve water quality essential for maintaining species populations and diversity, including measures to protect lakes, estuaries, wetlands and in-stream flows.”

### **Background:**

Washington State manages water resource for the people of the state under federal and state regulations and guidelines such as the Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Water Resource Act and Shoreline Act. Water is allocated for use through water rights based on Western Water law on a priority basis of first in time first in right. The 1971 Washington Water Resource Act was an important milestone in the management and stewardship of this public resource. The [Water Resource Act](#) states; “Proper utilization of the water resources of this state is necessary to the promotion of public health and the economic well - being of the state and the preservation of its natural resources and aesthetic values”. It further acknowledges the increased competition for use of this limited resource and the importance of preserving the in - stream resources. The LWVWA has been a strong supporter of water policy that supports the principles of the Water Resource Act and has fought to prevent legislative attempts to weaken this guiding policy for responsible stewardship of our precious water resource.

The House and Senate failed to pass the several water bills introduced in the recent biennial session. There continues to be significant disagreement between the parties on how to address the permit-exempt well issue brought to the forefront with the Hirst decision. The roles and responsibility of Ecology and local government in enforcing water rights and permits are the key issues that need to be addressed. The impasse on this issue was so strong it interfered with the passage of a capital budget.

Other issues unable to progress through the session were bills to reduce lead in drinking water over the next twelve years, aquatic invasive species management and loosening new water use permit requirements. It is likely these issues will be brought to the legislature again this year, and will be priorities for the League.

The Reclaimed Water Rule is moving toward approval, so it is likely there will be legislative effort to implement more extensive use of reclaimed water for agriculture and non-potable water demand in an effort to reduce the pressure on ground water and rivers. However, there remain uncertainty on subtle quality issues of reclaimed water for the aquatic environment and quantity issues to downstream users when water taken from the stream is reused in another area in lieu of returning to the stream. There will likely be legislation to address these issues in the near future.

Each of these solutions to very real problems will require enforcing existing laws on regulating water use and impacts on senior rights as well water conservation. Compromise may require reapportioning water from other users including the environment. The League will continue to support comprehensive region-wide management that recognizes natural values over economic interests, long term effects over short-term interests and statewide over local interests.

**Contact Information:** Martin Gibbins, 425-361-5007, [mgibbins@lwvwa.org](mailto:mgibbins@lwvwa.org)