

Frequently asked questions:

Do I jeopardize my water right by leasing?

No. You retain ownership of your water right and lease the use to another entity. Leasing water for instream purposes is considered a beneficial use in Montana, and is a way to prevent abandonment of your water right.

How much can I get paid for my water?

We assess the value of a water right based on a number of factors, including: the number of irrigated acres, crop production value of those acres, duration of the lease, reliability of the water right and fishery need. We also accept donations of water.

How is the amount of conserved water calculated?

We work closely with landowners to measure the seepage losses in their irrigation system prior to implementing conservation measures. We work with all parties to ensure that a fair value for the seepage amount is met, and that there is adequate water to maintain the productivity of the irrigated acres.

Can I lease or sell a portion of my water right?

Yes. You may lease all or part of your water right to instream use. You are also allowed a split-season lease, meaning your water is used for irrigation for part of the season and then leased for the remainder

When I elect to leave water instream, am I taking water away from existing users?

No. Instream rights hold the same priority as the original water right. They must yield to senior users, but can have priority over junior users.

Where does the Coalition get the money for these projects?

We receive the majority of project funding from state, federal, and private grant programs and foundations. Our primary grant source for water projects is the Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program, which is funded through the Bonneville Power Administration.



Canal lining and piping can increase irrigation efficiency and free up water that can be sold to conservation buyers for instream use.

About the Clark Fork Coalition

Founded in 1985, the Clark Fork Coalition is dedicated to protecting and restoring the Clark Fork River basin, a 22,000-square-mile area draining western Montana and northern Idaho. We have a 26-year-long record of substantial achievements improving the health of the watershed.

In 2010, the Coalition acquired the Montana Water Trust and its resources and expertise for our flow restoration program. Working closely with private landowners as well as federal and state agencies, we help design, fund, and implement projects that support working lands and enhance the flow and function of the Clark Fork River and its tributaries.



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Working with Water

TOOLS FOR LANDOWNERS



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Introduction:

The Clark Fork Coalition partners with private landowners, irrigation districts and water user groups to support clean water, healthy fisheries and working lands.

We participate in water management projects that support agriculture, and benefit the rivers and streams we all depend on for irrigation, recreation, drinking water, and fish and wildlife. We believe that clean, healthy streams can thrive alongside irrigated agriculture in our valleys. The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide information to water users about incentives and options for managing water, which can improve streamflows and a landowner's bottom line.

Where we work:



A leaky irrigation canal such as this one can lose as much as 50% of its water before it reaches a ranch.

Options for water right holders:

Irrigation Efficiency Improvements such as ditch lining, piping, or switching from flood irrigation to center-pivots can reduce the amount of water needed to meet irrigation demands. The saved water or water that would have been lost to seepage can be leased or sold to an instream use to help pay the costs associated with efficiency upgrades. Water savings can also come from repairing or increasing the capacity of water storage facilities. Switching from a flood to a pivot irrigation system or piping a leaky ditch not only saves water, but it also saves time and headaches from managing labor intensive irrigation systems.



Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch used a portion of their water leasing payment for upgrading their irrigation diversion dam and headgate.

Water Leasing is the temporary transfer of a water right to protect instream flows and is recognized as a beneficial use of a water right in Montana. The landowner retains ownership of the water rights, while the Coalition obtains use of the water for a specific period of time. Leases can be as short as part of an irrigation season or as long as 100 years. All or part of a water right can be leased. Landowners are compensated based on the number of acres leased, the period of time, and fishery benefit.

Point of Diversion and Source Changes

can save water in some cases. Relocating a headgate closer to irrigated acres, switching water sources from a tributary stream to a mainstem river, and adding a supplemental water source (such as groundwater) are options that may alleviate dewatering and provide benefits to streams.

Water Purchases allow for the permanent management of a water right for instream use. These opportunities can occur when landowners are changing the traditional use of a piece of irrigated ground (such as building a house or converting ground to wildlife habitat) and no longer need irrigation water for that piece of ground.

What these tools can do for you:

- Provide financial incentives for returning water to the river, and improve the viability of your agricultural operations.
- Reduce labor and maintenance costs of managing an aging irrigation system.
- Pressurize water systems and reduce or eliminate the need for pumps.
- Eliminate liabilities and safety hazards associated with open ditch systems.
- Improve water reliability, management and measurement.



Cost share is available for switching from flood to sprinkler irrigation systems.

Services the Coalition can offer:

- Meet with landowners to learn more about your water management goals and help evaluate if any of our programs might be right for you.
- Provide technical assistance and coordinate design studies of potential projects.
- Write grant applications and secure cost share from state, federal and private programs.
- Conduct water right reviews and file change applications with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.