4.1.1 Exempt Wells

Some domestic water users located outside of municipal water supplier service areas use exempt groundwater wells to meet their water needs. As discussed in Section 3.4.1, these wells are exempt from the requirements of obtaining a water right or metering. Potential tools for managing exempt wells to avoid cumulative impacts on the regional aquifer and prevent wells from going dry include:

- Domestic Water Conservation
- Measurement and Reporting of Existing Exempt Wells
- Regulation of Exempt Wells
- Mitigation and Measurement Requirement for New Exempt Wells

4.1.1.1 Domestic Water Conservation

Opportunity

- Providing incentives or technical assistance to households using exempt wells to encourage and facilitate conservation of their water uses.
- Metering and measurement could be paired with domestic water conservation projects to gather data on per-household water use before and after conservation is implemented.

Potential Beneficiaries

- Reduced groundwater demand from exempt wells could help slow the decline of groundwater levels to improve supply reliability for exempt well users and other groundwater users (domestic or agricultural).
- Groundwater discharge from springs/seeps supports streamflow and regulates stream temperature in the lower portion of the Planning Area.

Considerations

- Relatively small water use compared to other sectors in the basin.
- Staff capacity and funding.

4.1.1.2 Measurement and Reporting of Existing Exempt Wells

Opportunity

- Requiring measurement and reporting on exempt wells improves data availability to better understand the magnitude of their water use and inform potential conservation measures to reduce demand.
- Metering requirements for exempt well users could be imposed at the time of sale or refinancing of the property using an exempt well, or for any new developments that will use an exempt well.

Potential Beneficiaries

- Reduced groundwater demand from exempt wells could help slow the decline of groundwater levels to improve supply reliability for exempt well users and other groundwater users (domestic or agricultural).
- Groundwater discharge from springs/seeps supports streamflow and regulates stream temperature in the lower portion of the Planning Area.

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Considerations

- Would require state legislation or county ordinance.
- Well owners may resist new requirements, viewing them as intrusive.
- Accurate reporting and compliance may be costly and difficult to manage.
- Relatively small water use compared to other sectors in the basin.
- Might be limited initially to areas of unstable groundwater levels.

4.1.1.3 Regulation of Exempt Wells

Opportunity

- Regulating water use from exempt wells can help reduce demand on the aquifer from domestic water uses.
- Exempt wells that are injuring other water rights or are out of compliance with exempt use restrictions can be regulated (allowed by statute).

Potential Beneficiaries

- Reduced groundwater demand from exempt wells could help slow the decline of groundwater levels to improve supply reliability for exempt well users and other groundwater users (domestic or agricultural).
- Groundwater discharge from springs/seeps supports streamflow and regulates stream temperature in the lower portion of the Planning Area.

Considerations

- Would require state legislation.
- State political will/capacity to regulate exempt wells.
- Well owners may resist new requirements, viewing them as intrusive.
- Accurate reporting and compliance can be costly and difficult to manage.
- Relatively small water use compared to other sectors in the basin.

4.1.1.4 Mitigation and Measurement Requirement for New Exempt Wells

Opportunity

- New exempt wells would be subject to OWRD Groundwater Allocation rules based on groundwater availability.
- Require mitigation and measurement for new exempt wells.

Potential Beneficiaries

- Reduced groundwater demand from exempt wells could help slow the decline of groundwater levels to improve supply reliability for exempt well users and other groundwater users (domestic or agricultural).
- Groundwater discharge from springs/seeps supports streamflow and regulates stream temperature in the lower portion of the Planning Area.

Considerations

- Would require state legislation.
- State political will/capacity to regulate exempt wells.
- Relatively small water use compared to other sectors in the basin.

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- Potential competition between municipalities and new exempt well users for mitigation.

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