



# What is a Water Master?

Kevin Brown & Johnny Jones

May 21, 2025

# Agenda

- What is a Water Master?
- Kevin's perspective
- Cow Creek adjudication
- Where do we go from here?

# What is a Water Master?

## **RCW 90.03.070:**

It shall be the duty of the water master to:

1. divide, regulate, and control the use of water;
2. prevent the use of water in excess of the amount to which the owner of the right is lawfully entitled;
3. enforce Department rules and regulations.

# What is a Water Master?

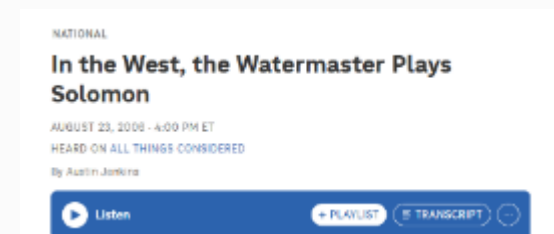
## **Department of Ecology:**

“Our watermasters work to assure water use is fair and legal. They also work to find water solutions, especially when water must be rationed or curtailed due to drought. They may issue curtailment orders or fines, but always look to solve water problems at the ground level in watersheds.”

# What is a Water Master?

## National Public Radio:

“In the arid American West, it's the job of the watermaster to referee water usage. During the hot and dry summer months, they are essentially water cops. Their job is to keep the peace among farmers whose livelihoods depend on a limited water supply...To many, the job confirms an old Western saying: ‘Whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting.’”

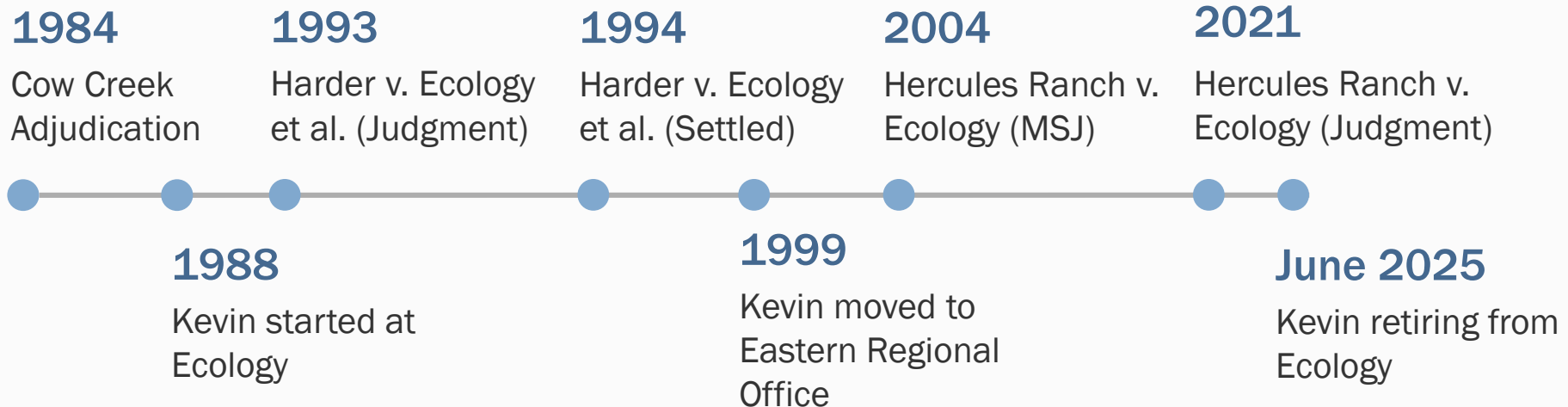




# Kevin's perspective



# Kevin's perspective

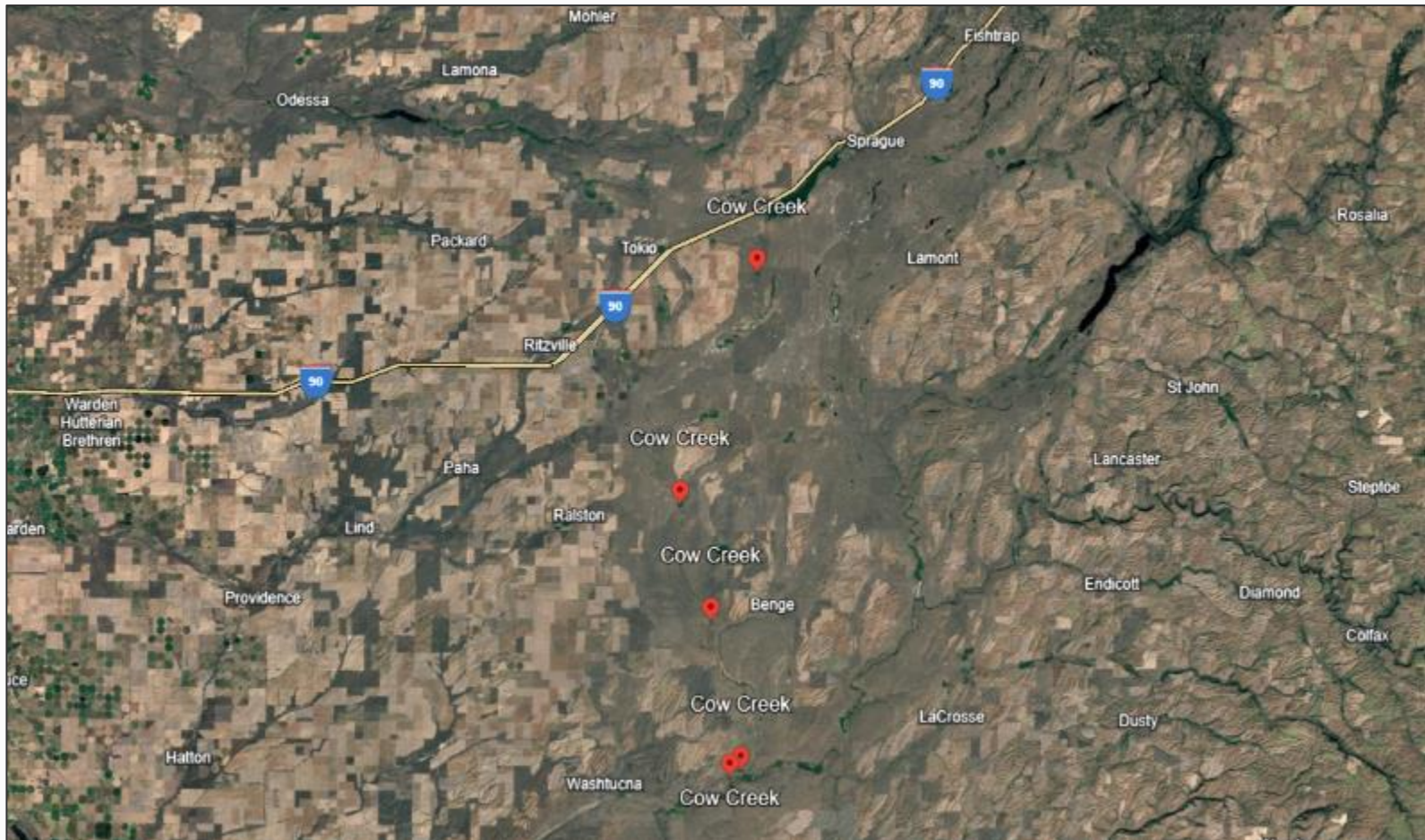








# Cow Creek adjudication



# Cow Creek adjudication



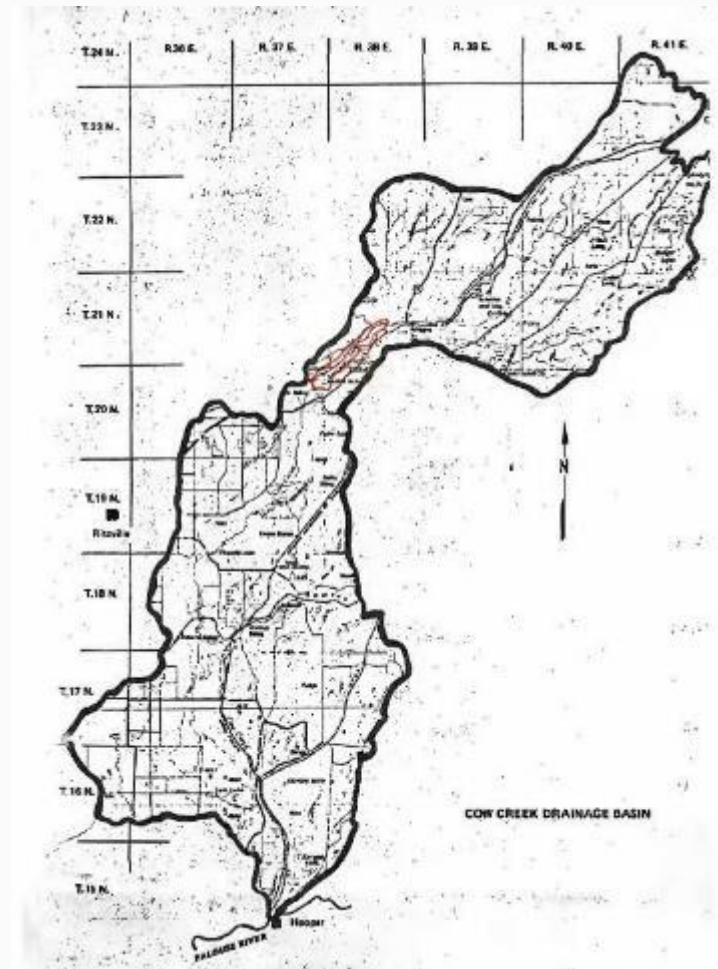
Outlet of Sprague Lake (S)

Resort at Sprague Lake (N)



# Cow Creek adjudication

- Extends ~60 miles in length
- Drains ~475 sq. miles
- Crosses Spokane, Lincoln, Whitman, and Adams Counties



# Cow Creek adjudication

1                                IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON  
2                                IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF ADAMS

3        IN THE MATTER OF THE DETERMINATION )  
4        OF THE RIGHTS TO THE USE OF THE        )  
5        SURFACE WATERS OF THE COW CREEK        )  
6        DRAINAGE BASIN IN ADAMS, LINCOLN,        )  
7        SPOKANE, AND WHITMAN COUNTIES,        )  
8        WASHINGTON, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE        )  
9        PROVISIONS OF CHAPTER 90.03,        )  
10        REVISED CODE OF WASHINGTON.        )  
11        )  
12        THE STATE OF WASHINGTON,        )  
13        DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY,        )  
14                                Plaintiff,        )  
15                                v.        )  
16        BAR U RANCH COMPANY, et al.,        )  
17                                Defendants.        )

18        \_\_\_\_\_ )

19        To the Honorable Judge of the above-entitled Court, the following  
20        report is respectfully submitted:

NO. 13538  
REPORT OF REFEREE  
  
[12/31/1984]



# Cow Creek adjudication

The third stipulation concerned the use of **stock water**, and was supported by the testimony of "old-time" residents of the area.

This stipulation reads as follows:

"It is hereby stipulated that stock water rights shall be recognized from surface water on all lands within the watershed to the extent of normal livestock grazing ability of the land, to include springs, both developed and undeveloped as having been acquired by appropriation prior to 1917. That as early as \_\_\_\_\_ cattle and other livestock commonly grazed the lands and drank water from all springs and water sources within the drainage basin, as shown on State's Exhibit No. 1."

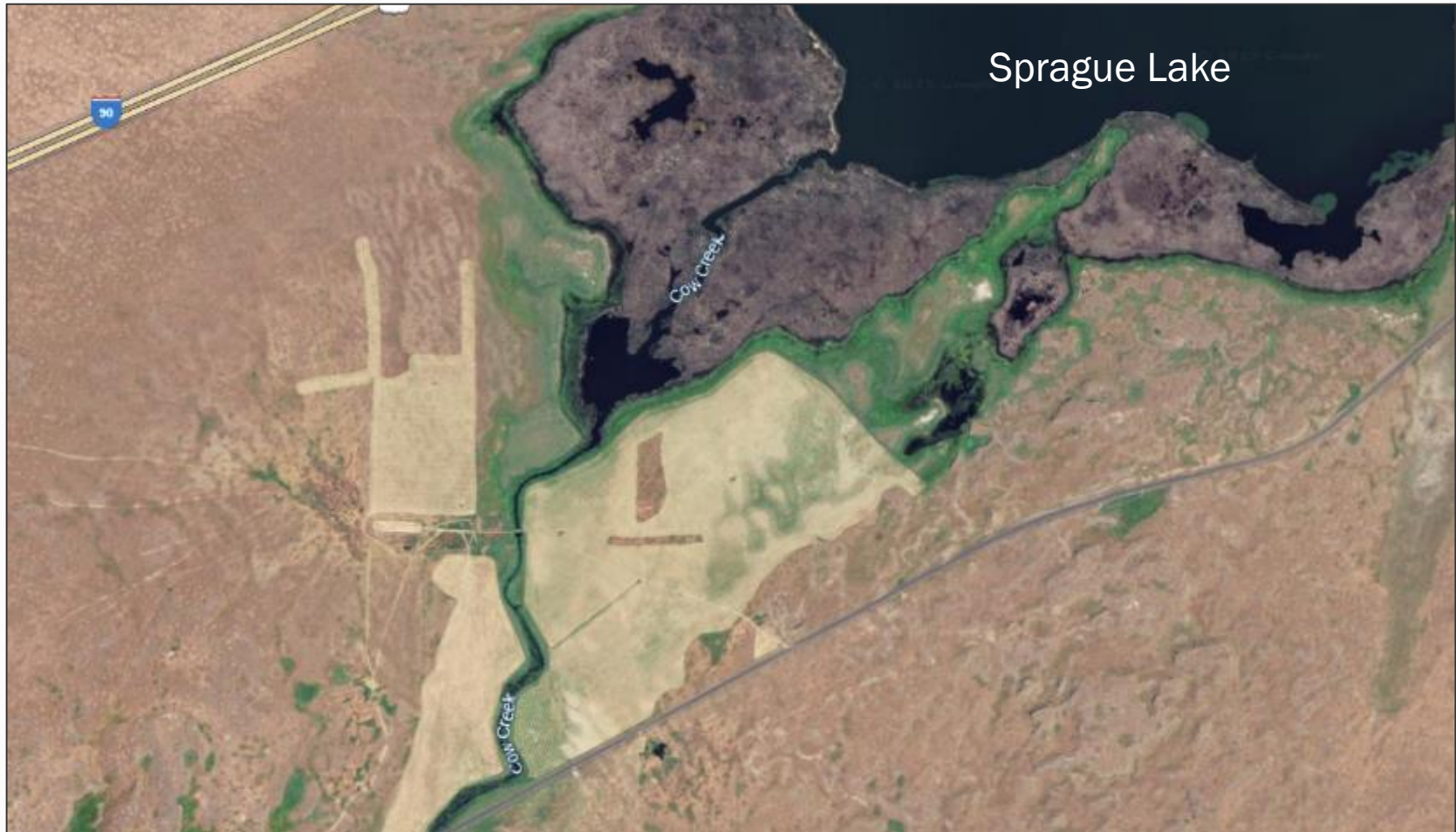
6 | exhibits, and the stock water stipulation. Based upon the aforemen-  
7 | tioned criteria, the Referee proposes to identify flows that will be  
8 | retained for nondiversionary stock watering purposes and assign a  
9 | **priority date of June 30, 1868.**



# Cow Creek adjudication



# Cow Creek adjudication



# Cow Creek adjudication







STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

4601 N Monroe Street • Spokane, Washington 99205-1295 • (509)329-3400

May 26, 2015

The Department of Ecology is responsible for the supervision of public waters within the state and their appropriation, diversion, storage, and use, Chapter 43-21A.064 Revised Code of Washington.

The use of surface waters from Cow Creek Drainage was adjudicated in Adams County Superior Court, *The State of Washington vs. Bar U Ranch Company, et al* in December 1986. **The Decree established a flow for the maintenance of stock water and those flows are not being met.**

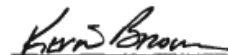
RCW 43.21A.064(3) reads in part: The Director, Department of Ecology, shall have the following powers and duties: he shall regulate and control the diversions of water in accordance with the rights thereto.

Field investigations in April and May of 2015 confirm the flows for stockwatering are not being fully satisfied. This request is being given because waters are being diverted under junior Adjudicated Surface Water Certificates and senior stock water flow requirements are not being met in accordance with the stockwater requirements established in the Report of Referee pages 264-265.

In view of the foregoing and in accordance with RCW 43.27A.190 the Department of Ecology formally requests your cooperation and voluntary compliance with the establishment of the water rights in Cow Creek Decree.

**Please close all ditch headgates and turn off pumps.**

If you have any questions, please contact me at 509-329-3422.



Kevin Brown  
Water Resources Program  
Department of Ecology  
State of Washington

# Cow Creek Adjudication



Spring, 2006



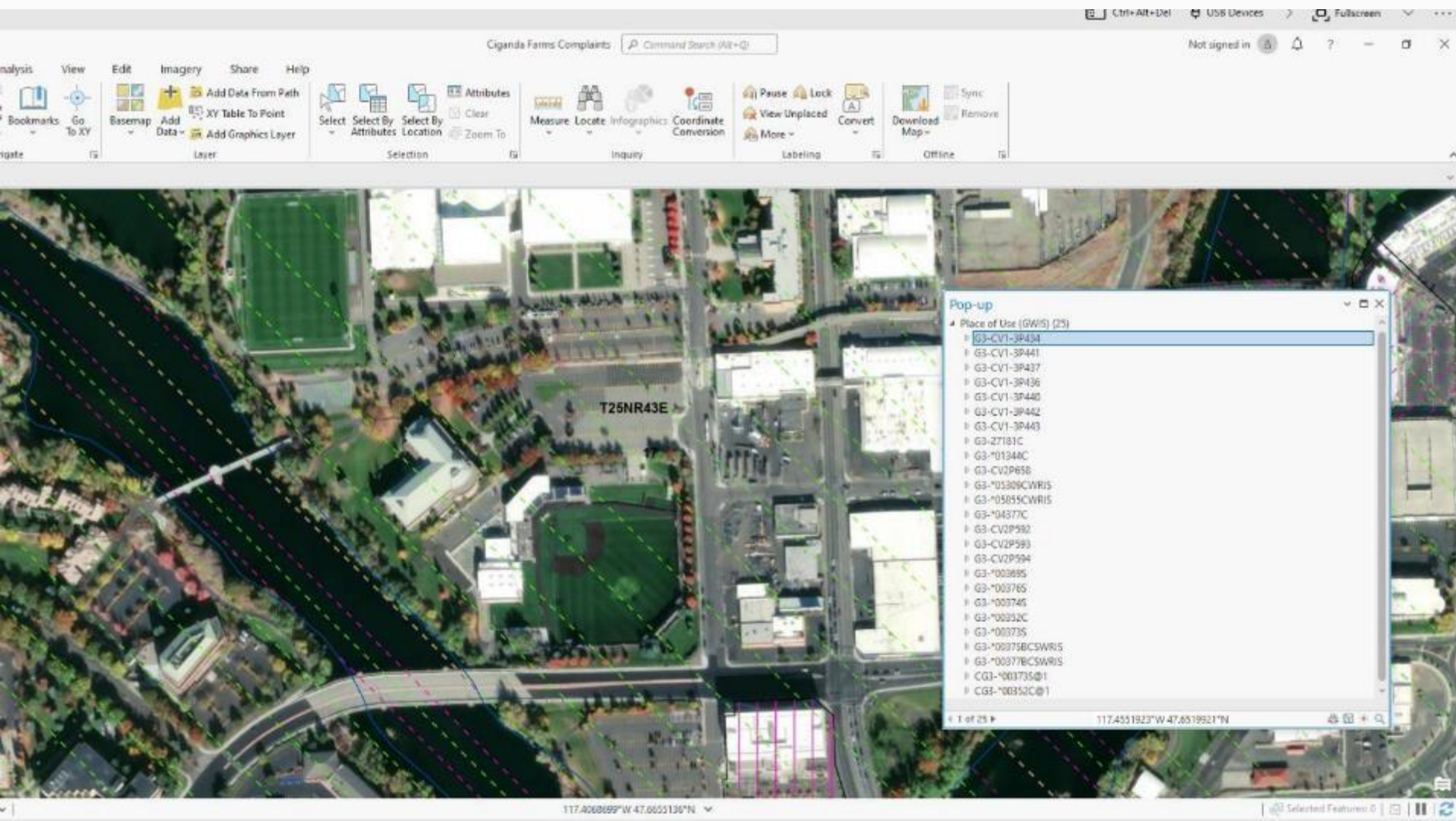
Spring, 2025



# Where do we go from here?

- Remote Sensing (OpenET)
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- Google Earth
- AgWeatherNet (WSU)
- National Archives and Records Service

# Where do we go from here?



# Where do we go from here?

S. F. No. 7282-1-25-134. 1972.

CERTIFICATE RECORD No. 2 PAGE No. 504-D UNDER DECLARATION OF CLAIM No. 372 & 373

STATE OF WASHINGTON, COUNTY OF Spokane

## Certificate of Ground Water Right

Issued in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 303, Laws of Washington for 1949, and the rules and regulations of the State Supervisor of Hydraulics thereunder.

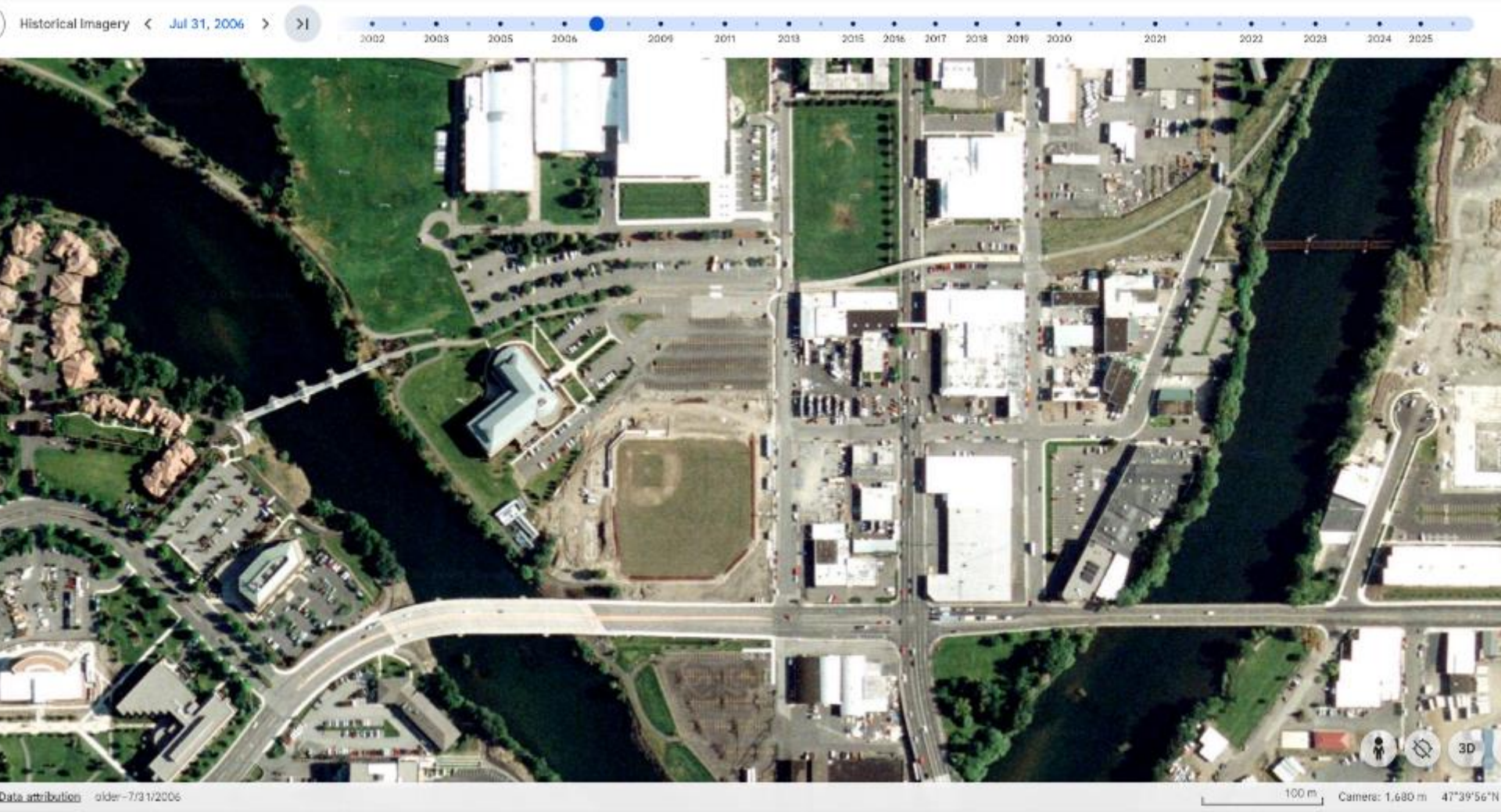
THIS IS TO CERTIFY That CITY OF SPOKANE, WATER DIVISION  
of Spokane, Washington has filed  
in the office of the State Supervisor of Hydraulics of Washington Declaration of Claim No. 372 & 373  
to withdraw ground waters of the State from a Two Pump Wells  
located within the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 11, Twp. 25 N., Rge. 45 E.W.M.

for the purpose of Municipal Supply

The right to the use of said ground waters has been sustained and approved by the Supervisor of

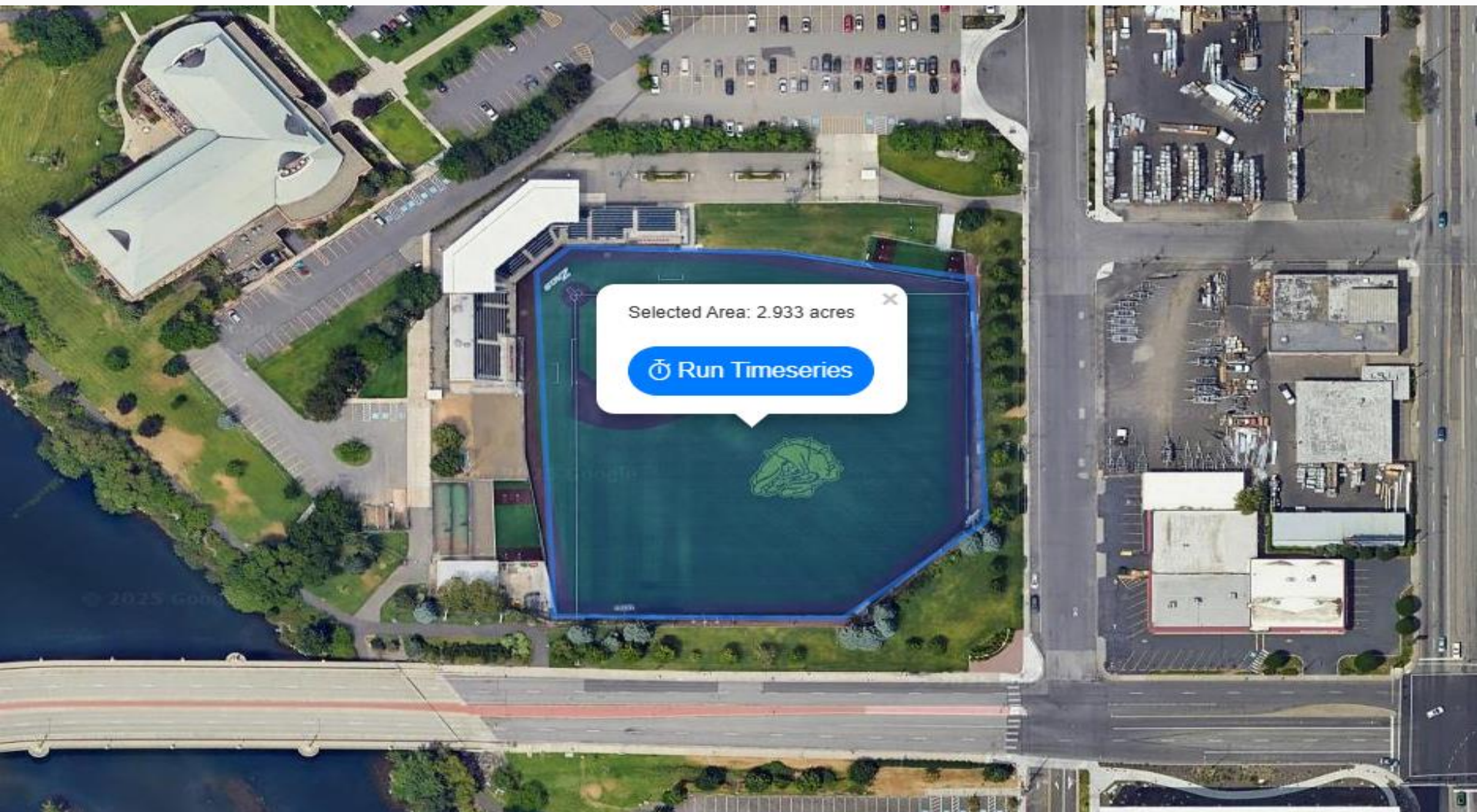


# Where do we go from here?





# Where do we go from here?



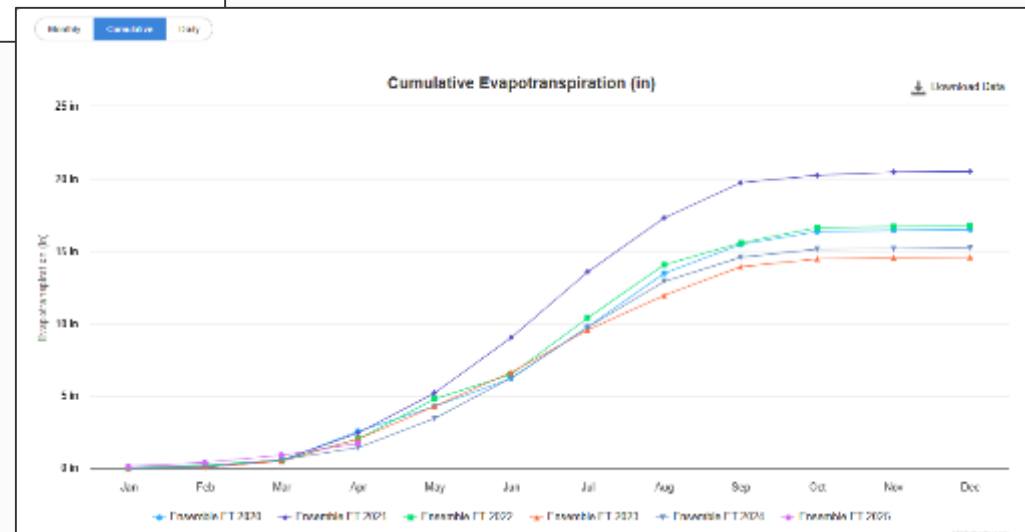


# Where do we go from here?



2024 annual use

Last 5 years monthly use





# Thank you

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Johnny: [jonj461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:jonj461@ecy.wa.gov)