

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Bonney Lake Water System, Rates and Billing

What kind of water system does Bonney Lake have?

The City of Bonney Lake owns and operates a public water system within its corporate boundaries as an enterprise fund. The City provides service to approximately 13,476 water customer accounts, which equates to a population of over 37,373. Of these accounts, 6,530 are residential accounts within the City, and 6,599 are residential accounts outside the City limits. There are also 201 Commercial accounts and 146 parks or dedicated irrigation systems. The water service area extends outside the city limits of Bonney Lake, to unincorporated areas in Pierce County around Lake Tapps, and serves customers inside the City of Auburn that reside in Pierce County. The City limits comprise an area of approximately 6.7 square miles and the water service area is approximately 25 square miles. The Washington Department of Health classifies the system as a Group A - Community - Public Water System. The Water Section of the Public Works Operations Division is headed by the Assistant Public Works Superintendent who reports to the Public Works Superintendent.

The City's water supply consists of two well fields and two spring sources. Both springs are classified as not under the influence of surface water. Combined water source capacity is 6,175 gallons per minute (GPM) or 8.8 million gallons per day (MGD). System storage capacity is provided by five water tanks that have a total capacity of 20.7 million gallons (MG). In addition, the Bonney Lake water system has fourteen major pressure zones with 27 pressure reducing stations, 7 booster pump stations, and more than 215 miles of water main.

Because of the uneven terrain in Bonney Lake, providing adequate water pressure for consumption and firefighting through a variety of tanks and booster pump stations makes the system more costly than in many communities. The City also has a long term water supply contract with Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU) for up to 2 MGD to supplement the City's existing water supply sources, and has negotiated the purchase of an additional 2 MGD from TPU with Cascade Water Alliance (CWA). Additionally, CWA will hold 2 MGD in White River water rights for the City until we can build a new well field. The combined water supply of 14.8 MGD will support projected growth in our water service area at least through the year 2040.

What about the water meters?

The City is currently completing the fourth year of a ten year plan to convert all water meters to radio read (AMR) meters. Currently, parts of the City may have either an older manual read, touch read or newer radio read meter. AMR meters are being installed on all new connections, as well as replacement of existing meters that are found to be improperly reading. AMRs have been installed in all of Bonney Lake's commercial area, and roughly 45% of the residential areas. AMRs have several benefits, including: minimized need to access your property to read your meter, increased customer service, pro-active leak detection, the ability to download up to 90 days' worth of consumption data in 1 hour intervals, controlled meter reading costs, and fewer employee injuries, especially in areas with fenced yards, dogs and landscaping. AMR

reading technology uses electronic registers to collect the readings and a radio to send the data that have proven to be more accurate than visually reading the meter by removing the possibility for human errors. In addition, each radio device has a unique identification number that is transmitted along with the meter reading. The unique identification number is compared electronically to your account record to ensure that the meter reading received matches the meter assigned to your account. While occasional issues arise, the water industry considers AMRs to be accurate and reliable. In light of unusually high summer water consumption, Bonney Lake is currently testing a sample of its AMR and manual read meters to check their accuracy. The City currently uses Neptune T-10 radio read meters as its standard. The T-10 can pass the following flows:

5/8" = 1/2 to 20 gpm

3/4" = 2 to 30 gpm

1" = 3 to 50 gpm

While a 5/8" meter is limited to a maximum flow of 20 gpm, a 3/4" or 1" meter (which is what Bonney Lake uses) can easily handle and accurately read all the water a customer wants to run through it.

When are water meters read?

Bonney Lake water customers are fairly evenly split between in-city and out-of-city, so meter readers read inside city accounts one month, and outside of city the other month. Meters are read on a bi-monthly basis for those residential customers who reside inside the Bonney Lake city limits. Meters for in-city accounts are read on odd months (January, March, May, July, September, and November). Residential customers who live outside the City limits have their meters read on a bi-monthly basis on even months (February, April, June, August, October, and December). Commercial non-residential accounts are billed monthly for both basic service charges and commodity (consumption) charges. Meters are read monthly. The City contracts with a billing service (located out of state) to do the actual mailing of the bills. This has proved less expensive than billing in-house.

How is my water service billed?

Residential customers who reside inside the corporate Bonney Lake city limits are billed for basic services on a monthly basis and for commodity (consumption) on a bi-monthly basis. Meters are read on odd months (January, March, May, July, September, and November). Residential customers who reside outside the corporate City limits are billed on a bi-monthly basis for both base charges and commodity (consumption) charges. Meters are read on even months (February, April, June, August, October, and December).

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What is Bonney Lake's water rate structure like?

Bonney Lake, like many cities, has adopted a conservation based rate structure. That means the more you use the progressively more you pay. As more water is used, the relative cost applied to additional quantities of water will increase. There is no “volume discount”. This is intended to discourage waste and promote conservation. This is not only for environmental stewardship purposes, but also because in the summer when peak demand exceeds what water the City can produce internally through its springs and wells, we have to purchase additional water from TPU through our inter-tie with them, as well as “fire up” additional wells. This costs the City hundreds of thousands of dollars each summer, which of course, is passed on to the rate payers who cause the excess demand. Accordingly, the water rate structure discourages high consumption. Although there is no cap as to how much water you can use, you will pay a premium for high water use during the summer.

What is the monthly water availability charge?

This is a fixed monthly fee, determined by the size of the water meter installed at your property. This fee helps more equitably distribute service costs that are not related to the volume of water used, such as bill production, customer service, water service inspections, meter reading and maintenance/replacement of meters.

How does my sewer bill relate to my water bill?

Residential customers are charged a monthly base charge for sewer, and then volumetric charges per 100 cubic feet (748 gallons), 100 cubic feet = 1 CCF, of monthly water consumption. The current volumetric rate is \$3.80 per CCF. However, for single-family residences the volumetric charge is capped at 10 CCF per month (7,480 gallons). During the winter, the average household will use 6,000 – 8,000 gallons of water. The reasoning behind the 10 CCF price cap is because during the winter you generally do not water the lawn, etc. and this outside water use is not discharged into the sewer system.

What is sewer volumetric?

A charge for the volume of water discharged to the sewer based on the water usage. The volumetric charge is capped at 20 CCF every two months for residential customers. Sewer availability charges are billed monthly and volumetric charges are billed bi-monthly when the water meter is read.

Why are water rates higher in the summer than in the winter?

The higher summer rate encourages customers to use water prudently at a time when demand is high and rainfall is low. Also, in order to meet higher water demand in the summer the City needs to supplement its base water supply with additional water from a treated well or outside sources that are much more expensive.

How can a water bill vary so much from one month to another?

Like most water utilities, Bonney Lake water rates are cheaper in the winter than in the summer. That is because in order to meet higher water demand in the summer the City needs to supplement its base water supply with additional water from a treated well or outside sources

that are much more expensive. When you get a water bill in the early fall for the past 2 months of summer use, it may seem exorbitant when compared to your last (winter rate) bill. Also, consumption can vary from month to month depending on things such as: recent changes in water use (e.g. due to family size), new water-consuming equipment, water use habits, leaky/running toilets, leaky faucets & fixtures, leaks in irrigation lines; water service line leaks, or old, outdated fixtures & toilets, etc.

What does the City do to alert customers to high water use?

When preparing the utility bills, the computer will generate a meter read edit list. All accounts that used more than double during the same period as the previous year's water are sent a courtesy notice. In those instances City staff notifies the customer by either a letter or a "door hanger" alerting the customer to the high water consumption for the period. Some people refer to these as leak notices, but a water leak could be one of several causes for the high consumption.

What can I do if my bill seems unusually high?

If you believe you were billed in error because of a misread or a faulty water meter, it can be easily checked. Compare the present reading on your bill to the reading on your meter. If the number on your meter is smaller than the reading on your statement, the meter has been misread. Call us at (253) 447-4317, we will send someone out check the meter reading, correct our records as needed, and send an adjusted statement. If the reading on your meter is larger than the present reading on the statement, the reading is likely accurate. If you suspect a faulty meter may be inaccurately recording the amount of water used, call us.

Occasionally, a water meter does malfunction. A malfunctioning meter can record usage at a higher or lower rate than is accurate, but does not record usage when no water is being used. A water meter is a simple mechanism with a volumetric chamber that is rotated by the flow of water through the meter. If no water is flowing, the chamber cannot rotate on its own. You can request a meter test by signing the form available at the City utility billing office in the Justice and Municipal Center at 9002 Main St E, or download the form from the City website. If a meter is found to be malfunctioning, it will be replaced and the billing adjusted. If the meter is NOT malfunctioning, the billing is NOT adjusted and your account is charged a service fee of \$50.00. Prior to this test your meter is removed and replaced with a new meter. The meter is taken directly to the City shop where a pre-measured amount of water is run through the meter to determine the meter's accuracy. If you have questions or require additional information, please contact the utility desk at (253) 447-4317. Office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Utility charges are due upon receipt and become delinquent on the 15th of the month following the billing. A monthly penalty of two percent (2%) of the past due balance but not less than \$10.00 shall be charged to all delinquent accounts. Disconnection is scheduled 30 days after the date of delinquency. In the event of disconnection (water shut-off) due to delinquency, all charges plus a \$100.00 turn-on fee must be paid to reconnect service. Utility accounts are ultimately the responsibility of the property owner. The owner remains responsible for payment, even if the property owner provides a written request to bill tenants. The Chief Financial Officer

of the City is authorized to approve payment plans when circumstances warrant, and is the highest ranking officer of the City with the authority to adjust a utility statement.

Does the City offer a water rate discount to Senior/Disabled customers?

Yes, under limited circumstances. To qualify to receive this discount, the utility customer must provide proof that they receive the Pierce County "Senior Citizens & Disabled Persons Property Tax Exemption". Because of this requirement, only the property owner can apply for the discount. For more information about the County's property tax discount, please visit the [Pierce County website](#) or call the Pierce County Assessor-Treasurer's Office at (253) 798-2169. The Bonney Lake Senior/Disabled Persons discount for qualifying property owners is: Water: 50% reduction from the standard Water Availability Charge (base rate); Sewer: 20% reduction from the Sewer Availability Charge. There is no discount on the Commodity (Consumption) Charge.

Can I request to have my meter tested?

Yes. If there is a question of the accuracy of a water meter, the customer may request the meter be tested. The cost of the meter test is \$50 unless the meter test proves that the meter is not functioning properly, then the \$50 fee will be waived and the consumption charges will be adjusted accordingly.

Can I get an adjustment on my water bill if I have a leak?

Yes, under limited circumstances. If the leak is in your water service line (the water pipe that runs from the water meter to your home), you may be eligible for an adjustment. Under certain circumstances, leaks to irrigation lines likewise qualify for a leak adjustment. This is your responsibility to maintain and repair as needed. Because it is underground, leaks may not be readily detected. No leak adjustments are granted for water leaks due to third party actions, or due to faulty equipment or fixtures inside the structure, including leaky toilets, faucets, etc. The adjustment is two-thirds of that portion of the customer's water bill determined by calculating the median consumption for the past five years for the same period the leak occurred. The adjustment is limited to the period of 120 days of consumptive use prior to the repair of the leak. The complete regulation on leak adjustments can be viewed at <http://www.codepublishing.com/WA/BonneyLake/#!/BonneyLake13/BonneyLake1304.html#13.04.100>

I received a high bill. How can I check for leaks?

You may have a manual, touch read or radio read meter. If you're not sure what type of meter you have, please call the utility desk at (253) 447-4317 and we can look that information up for you. We have a number of brochures that can help you check your meter. Call the utility desk to have one mailed or emailed to you.

My house is vacant – why am I still receiving a bill?

The city provides year-round facilities for supplying water and collecting wastewater and stormwater. All users are billed an availability charge on a continuing basis for water, sewer and stormwater (if applicable) availability. Billings continue during periods of non-use, including

periods when the water has been disconnected due to delinquency or when a structure is unoccupied. It costs a certain amount to assure that water is available to any given property in the City. The availability charge is essentially an access charge reflecting the cost of providing consumer access to the water system. The justification for the availability charge is that the water utility incurs certain costs regardless of whether or not consumers receive service. These fixed costs are not impacted by the amount of water supplied.

How do Bonney Lake's current water rates compare to other public water utilities?

Because of differences in terrain, system age, water supply, water quality, etc. water systems do not cost the same across the board. The Bonney Lake water system is more complex than that of the average city our size. People like to compare relative rates none the less. Bonney Lake's water rates fall into the "average" range for basic household use, and higher than average rates for high water consumers. Currently, the average Bonney Lake household using 7 CCF of water per month will have a slightly lower water bill than folks in Enumclaw, Sumner, Buckley, or Gig Harbor, about the same as Auburn, and somewhat more than those in Puyallup or Milton. However, because of the tiered conservation based rate structure, high water consumption users will pay more than in many of these same cities.

What can I do to conserve water to lower my bill?

Recent changes in water use, new water-consuming equipment, water use habits, leaky/running toilets, leaky faucets & fixtures, leaks in irrigation lines; water service line leaks, or old, and outdated fixtures & toilets can all lead to higher water bills. Here are some tips on how to conserve water to lower your water bill:

1: Fix Leaky/Running Toilets

Here's an interesting fact from the EPA: toilets account for 26.7% of the indoor water use for the average American home. This makes toilets the single biggest source of indoor water use. A running or leaky toilet can waste up to 200 gallons of water in a single day, or 1,400 gallons (almost 2 CCF) of water per week. Not sure if your toilet is leaking? You can check for a toilet leak in two ways:

1. The Sound Check. Simply walk up to your toilet and listen. If you hear an odd hiss-like noise, you may have a leak and will want to check further.
2. The Dye Test. For this test, you'll need some food coloring or a dye tablet. Take the lid off of your toilet's tank and put in a couple of drops of coloring (or a dye tablet). After you've put the dye in the tank, wait for 15-20 minutes and check the toilet bowl for dye. If dye is present, then there's a leak allowing tank water to flow into the bowl.

In most cases, these leaks will be caused by a faulty flapper in the toilet tank. This is a relatively easy fix that only requires a short trip to your local home improvement/hardware store and a few minutes.

2: Fix Leaky Faucets & Fixtures

Leaky faucet fixtures are another all-too-common cause of high water bills. The heavier the leak, the more water gets wasted, and the higher the water bill will be. For example, as noted by the EPA, “a leaky faucet that drips at the rate of one drip per second can waste more than 3,000 gallons (4 CCF) per year.” Thankfully, this is a problem that’s easy to spot and fix. A simple visual check of your faucets, shower heads, and other fixtures is all it takes to identify a leak at the fixture.

3: Stop Irrigation Leaks

Not all leaks occur indoors. If you have an irrigation system for your landscaping, a line crack or loose joint could allow water to leak even when the irrigation system is off. Finding these leaks can be a little tricky, especially if the lines for the irrigation system are buried out of sight.

To spot these leaks, you may need to check your landscaping/lawn for unusually damp patches or areas of grass that are more lush than their surroundings. However, these signs of a leak are similar to the signs of a leak in a lateral line.

To fix this kind of leak, you may need to consult a professional plumber to find the location of the leak and to fix or replace the affected irrigation lines.

4: Fix Lateral Line Leaks

In some cases, one of the underground pipes feeding water from your metered connection to your home may have a crack or loose joint. The causes of these leaks vary, but things such as pipe age, seismic activity, tree root intrusion, and animal activity are often contributing factors.

This problem, while similar to an irrigation leak, is usually much more severe. When trying to tell if the leak is in your irrigation line or your lateral line water supply pipe, the amount of extra water consumption noted on your utility bill can serve as an indicator.

For these leaks, the best solution is to contact a professional. A professional can recommend the best solution for the problem—such as traditional trench & replace, trenchless pipe lining, or pipe bursting.

5: Repair Old, Outdated Fixtures & Toilets

Many homes have a long history attached to them, and equally old plumbing fixtures. In recent years, there have been numerous efficiency improvements made to common water fixtures, such as new-model aerators for faucets, low-flow water-saving toilets, and water-saving shower heads.

This rarely shows up as a sudden problem—it’s usually something that comes with the house and has you paying high water bills from day one.

Check your home's faucets, toilets, showerheads, and other water-using equipment for labeling or date of manufacture. When buying a new home, ask the owner or real estate agent how old the plumbing fixtures are.

6: Consider Recent Changes in Water Use

One small change in your water use habits or household situation can have a big difference on your utility bill. Two big reasons you might change your water use habits include a change in the season or adding a new guest/family member to your household. The best fix to counter or prevent a sharp spike in your water use is to plan ahead when possible. In some cases, you may need to budget for higher water consumption during certain months or for as long as you have that additional person in your home.

7: Consider New Water-Consuming Equipment

On a related note, adding new water-intensive equipment to your home can also cause a significant increase in your water bill. Pools, sprinkler systems, washing machines, freezers, and other new equipment can result in a sudden increase in your water bill.

To minimize the impact of new equipment on your water bill, try to select appliances that are marked as high-efficiency or have EPA's WaterSense label. If you add a pool to your property, be sure to cover it when not in use to minimize the water loss from evaporation so you don't have to use as much water to refill it.

8: Water Wasting Habits

25. Letting the water run when brushing your teeth or shaving. Two gallons per minute are wasted. Installing a low flow aerator on your faucet can save more than 140 gallons of water a month.

24. Running the faucet until it becomes cool instead of refrigerating a container of drinking water.

23. Not using a stopper when filling the sink to wash dishes by hand.

22. Setting the temperature very high in your spa or pool. Warmer water evaporates more quickly.

21. Running a dishwasher that is not full.

20. Taking long showers without using a low flow showerhead. Reducing your shower time by just 1-2 minutes can save up to 700 gallons per month. Using a low flow showerhead can save up to 800 gallons of water per month.

19. Not repairing leaky faucets. Grab a wrench, it's simple and can save up to 140 gallons a week.

18. Over-filling the bathtub instead of using the necessary amount. Bathing babies, small children and pets typically require less than a full bathtub.
17. Washing less than full loads in the clothes washer. Typical clothes washers use 35-50 gallons per load whether full or not.
16. Not regularly checking and repairing leaks inside the home (e.g. bathtubs, faucets, and toilets).
15. Not replacing pre-1993 toilets with ultra low flush or high efficiency toilets. Toilets installed prior to 1993 use almost 2 gallons more water per flush.
14. Using the toilet as a wastebasket. Wastes up to 5 gallons per flush.
13. Not using a pool cover which reduces water loss due to normal evaporation.
12. Watering on windy days. Water often is blown onto the walkway or driveway. Also water evaporates faster on windy days.
11. Installing plants that require constant watering or are not appropriate for the local climate.
10. When irrigating the yard, watering the pavement. Check your sprinklers and adjust them to water the landscape, not the pavement.
9. Not using compost or mulch to reduce water runoff and evaporation.
8. Not seasonally checking the irrigation system(s) for leaks.
7. Using the garden hose to wash down sidewalks instead of using a broom. A garden hose can use more than 10 gallons of water per minute!
6. Not using soaker hoses or drip irrigation in flower beds which can save up to 50% of water used compared to sprinklers.
5. Using the garden hose without a shutoff nozzle.
4. Watering more than three days a week during hot weather. Water your lawn efficiently up to three times per week to assure that moisture reaches deep down to the roots.
3. Not watering between 9:00 a.m. and Noon or after 8:00 p.m. when water evaporation is minimal.
2. Watering when it is not necessary.
1. and the Number 1 way people waste water..... Overwatering the lawn! Too much water results in water running off the lawn.