

Ecology Updates for the Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee



May 2023 Updates

Nonpoint Plan update and Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture

Washington's [Water Quality Management Plan to Control Nonpoint Sources of Pollution](#) (Nonpoint Plan) outlines Washington State's approach for addressing water quality impacts from nonpoint sources of pollution. This plan describes how we meet Clean Water Act requirements and ensures eligibility for 319 grant funding for nonpoint pollution control projects across the state.

We submitted the plan to EPA at the end 2022. Also included with the plan were four chapters of the [Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture](#). Many people on the Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee participated on the guidance workgroup and their feedback helped improve these chapters. EPA has until June to act on the plan (approve or disapprove). We are confident that the plan will be approved and are excited to continue working with partners to implement it. Our work with agriculture stakeholders is a key part of cleaning up watersheds and improving water quality. The next update will be in 2025 and include a public review. Our goal is to start working with stakeholders on the updates in 2024.

Work in the Watersheds

Eastern Washington

Eastern Region Office completed watershed evaluations this March in seven focus areas:

- Blue Mountain tributaries to Snake River (Asotin, Tenmile, Alpowa, Deadman, and Meadow Creek)
- Direct Whitman County Tributaries to the Snake River (Steptoe, Wawawai, Penawawa, Alkali Flat) (WRIA 35)
- Walla Walla River
- Palouse River and tributaries including Spring Flat Creek
- Hangman Creek
- Little Spokane River Watershed
- Hawk Creek

As part of our watershed evaluation work, we prioritize parcels needing follow-up based on specific water quality criteria and then contact landowners. We anticipate contacting approximately 35 new sites by early summer across the seven areas. We will also call these producers to explain the watershed evaluation process, discuss the availability of technical and financial assistance, and offer a site visit to help them make the needed management changes.

We will revisit sites identified during previous watershed evaluations to evaluate current conditions and reach out to those who still have work to do to protect water quality.

Table 1. Approximate number of new priority sites to contact

Watershed	New Site #	Land-Use
Hangman	15	Livestock and Tillage
Little Spokane	5	Livestock and Tillage
Spring Flat	5	Livestock and Tillage
All Other Watersheds	5-10	Livestock

Work to improve oxygen levels and reduce sediment, bacteria, and temperature inputs to Hangman Creek continues. We recently partnered with the Spokane Conservation District on a \$1 million dollar pilot program that compensates landowners for riparian land taken out of dryland ag production and restored with native trees and shrubs. The original goal of the project was to protect 70 acres of riparian area. There has been so much interest in this program that we increased the budget to \$3.5 million and have enrolled more than 225 acres of riparian area. Installation of these buffers begins this spring.

Seven additional Ecology Centennial/319 grants are on the [FY2024 draft offer list](#) to fund water quality protection practices on agricultural lands in the Eastern region. The new grants will provide more than \$3.2 million in additional support.

2023 Central Region Office Focus Areas

- Wide Hollow Creek (Yakima County)
- Upper Naches and Cowiche Creek (Yakima County)
- Bonaparte Creek (Okanogan River)
- White Salmon River (Klickitat County)
- Wilson Creek (Kittitas County)
- Granger Drain (Yakima County)

The Wide Hollow Creek Temperature TMDL continues to make progress. The implementation plan for Upper Naches and Cowiche Creek Temperature TMDL Plan is under development and we are talking with partners in the watershed about implementation.

The study plan for the Bacteria Water Cleanup Project in the White Salmon River, which has a TMDL, was recently completed and we are collecting data to support water cleanup efforts.

We recently initiated nonpoint assessment work in the Bonaparte Creek Watershed located in Okanogan County. We're coordinating closely with the local conservation district to address bacteria and temperature water quality impairments. Watershed assessment field work is taking places this spring and summer.

Last year we began implementation of the Wilson Creek and Grainger Drain TMDLs, including landowner outreach and surface water monitoring by Ecology staff. Additional efforts and monitoring in the Wilson Creek Watershed are being coordinated with local watershed partners. Monitoring shows progress towards meeting the TMDL loading goals for these watersheds.

Western Washington

Watersheds Southwest Region Office is working in:

- Enumclaw Plateau (Boise, Pussyfoot, and Second Creeks)
- East Fork Lewis River
- Greater Key Peninsula
- Eld Inlet, Henderson Inlet, and Nisqually Reach
- Oakland Bay and Johns Creek
- Skokomish Valley & Annas Bay
- Nisqually River and Ohop Creek
- Lacamas Creek

We have been working hard to implement best management practices in the Boise, Pussyfoot, and Second Creeks since 2014. In 2022, staff completed 16 watershed evaluations and 23 visits at various sites of concern. Following the established compliance pathway, staff sent five technical assistance letters, one warning letter, and one administrative order. Staff also coordinated with the Washington State Department of Agriculture to address two dairy facilities that discharged in 2022 and are required to obtain coverage under the CAFO permit.

The Poop Smart Clark PIC program, of which Ecology is a member, commenced last year in the East fork Lewis River Watershed. The goal of the program is to eliminate bacteria sources through technical assistance. Ecology distributed over 250 flyers to agricultural producers and landowners that may benefit from septic repair assistance in the watershed. We have responded to sites identified during watershed assessments and our Environmental Report Tracking System (ERTS) reports and have sent nine technical assistance letters referring landowners to the Clark Conservation District.

Staff are coordinating with the Pierce Conservation District to address nonpoint source bacteria pollution in the Nisqually River Valley. We completed 11 watershed assessments where sites of concern were identified and on-site improvements or continued noncompliance were documented. Ecology worked with three landowners in the Ohop Valley to provide technical assistance on changes to current land use practices. Ecology issued one penalty, completed two site visits, and sent one follow up letter.

Success Story

Ohop Creek was identified in the Nisqually River Dissolved Oxygen and Fecal Coliform TMDL as a priority watershed for reduction in fecal coliform levels and identified as a priority watershed for Chinook recovery. SWRO staff worked with local partners as a part of a cooperative effort to improve the watershed; this has resulted in land use changes that protect and improve water quality. Ecology nonpoint staff serve as the regulatory backstop to reduce water pollution, the Pierce Conservation District has provided technical assistance to landowners, and the Land Trust has both purchased land and utilized land swaps to permanently protect water quality in Ohop Creek. Although we don't yet have water quality data showing improvements, through these combined efforts, including Nisqually Land Trust's protection of nearly 8 miles of Ohop Creek shoreline, observed changes in land use practices suggest a return to cleaner water in Ohop Creek for healthy fish.

Watersheds Northwest Region Office is working in:

- Green River
- Padilla Bay Tributaries
- Snohomish River
- Lower Skagit River and South Skagit Bay

We are implementing two TMDLs in the Green River watershed: the Green River Temperature TMDL and the Newaukum Creek Temperature TMDL (both established in 2011). Both studies found that lack of adequate riparian vegetation contributes to temperature impairments. As a result, implementation is focused on riparian restoration by removing invasive species and planting native vegetation. Currently, Ecology is funding two major riparian restoration projects along the Green River, implemented by King County basin stewards:

- Horsehead site in the Lower Green – project will restore 8.5 acres of riparian buffer
- Flaming Geyser site in the Middle Green – project will restore 14 acres of riparian buffer

As part of the Clean Samish Initiative, Ecology staff worked with Skagit County Public Works, the Skagit Conservation District, and Washington State Department of Agriculture to identify and correct sources of fecal coliform pollution in the Samish basin. Based on high bacteria numbers documented during the development of the Padilla Bay Freshwater Tributaries Bacteria TMDL, site specific monitoring is ongoing in the Little Indian Slough portion of the Padilla Bay watershed to identify and reduce bacterial pollution. Ecology staff have contacted 20 property owners in the Samish/Padilla Bay watershed to provide technical assistance.

In South Skagit Bay, we continued our watershed evaluation work, which included evaluations of the Old Stillaguamish channel area the Big Ditch/Maddox Slough sub-watersheds. Much of this work focused on running a water sampling program to characterize watershed bacteria levels and assist in identifying sources of pollutants. Properties with elevated potential to pollute were highlighted for future technical assistance. In 2022, Ecology sent an informational post card sent to 633 property owners in the South Skagit Bay project area. As we identify priority high risk properties, we plan on contacting property owners as appropriate, and offering technical assistance. We will rely on local conservation districts to assist landowners when parties are willing.

We are also working with a property owner and their horse boarding facility to protect a stream from bacteria pollution in Kitsap County. Ecology has coordinated with the local health district and the Kitsap Conservation District at this location since March 2020.

Watersheds Bellingham Field Office is working in:

- Lake Whatcom
- Whatcom Creek
- Lummi Bay
- Portage Bay
- Nooksack River and South Fork Nooksack River

In cooperation with Whatcom Clean Water Program (WCWP) partners, Ecology nonpoint staff worked in the Nooksack River, Jordan Creek, Sumas River, and Drayton harbor watersheds to identify and address

nonpoint sources of pollution. We coordinated closely with WCWP partner agencies to identify confirmed or suspected pollution sources, contact landowners, and improve livestock management practices in our watersheds, which resulted in contact with 53 property owners for technical assistance and issuing one administrative order.

We announced our draft Whatcom Creek bacteria TMDL and implementation plan for public comment in March 2023. This plan address high bacteria levels in Whatcom Creek as well as the four primary tributaries that drain into Whatcom Creek: including Hanna, Fever, Cemetery, and Lincoln creeks. Following public review, the TMDL will be submitted to EPA for approval.

Implementation of the Nooksack River bacteria TMDL continues through involvement from local project partners primarily conducted through the Whatcom Clean Water Program (WCWP). Ecology coordinates and conducts stormwater sampling along with routine ambient monitoring to identify pollution sources. These data are shared through the WCWP, which represents a local PIC component. Consistently high bacteria concentrations have been observed at Canadian-United States boarder from fall 2022 through winter during both wet runoff conditions and dry conditions with no runoff. The WCWP is engaged with Canadian workgroups and governmental organizations to find and correct pollution sources that originate in Canada to comprehensively address the Nooksack basin.