

# Ecology Updates for the Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee



## May 2024 Updates

### 2025 Nonpoint Plan update and Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture

Washington's [Water Quality Management Plan to Control Nonpoint Sources of Pollution](#)<sup>1</sup> (Nonpoint Plan) outlines Washington State's approach for addressing water quality impacts from nonpoint sources of pollution. This plan describes how Ecology, the Washington State Conservation Commission, Washington Department of Agriculture, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Department of Health, and Washington Department of Natural Resources work to ensure Clean Water Act requirements and that the state retains eligibility for 319 grant funding for nonpoint pollution control projects across the state. Our next plan update is due to EPA December 31, 2025.

To develop the 2025 Nonpoint Plan, we are reflecting on the successes and challenges of the past and incorporating those lessons learned, as well as looking ahead to anticipate changing conditions, new challenges, and adapt strategies to meet our goal of achieving clean water in Washington State.

We have begun early informal engagement with Tribes, focusing on listening sessions. We will soon begin collaborating with state agencies and will include outreach and engagement with stakeholders who engage with this work and are impacted by the policy decisions set by this plan. We are beginning the outreach process early with the goal of providing ample opportunity for listening. We anticipate public comment period early summer 2025. To receive updates, learn more about Washington's Nonpoint Plan, or engage in future listening sessions, workgroups, and/or webinars, contact us at [nonpoint@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:nonpoint@ecy.wa.gov).

The Plan, and eight remaining chapters of the [Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture](#)<sup>2</sup>, are due December 31, 2025. We will continue with the advisory workgroup. Agriculture stakeholders are a key part of cleaning up watersheds and improving water quality and their input is essential. We plan to share drafted chapters as they are available and look forward to receiving feedback as a part of the Nonpoint Plan comment period.

## Work in the Watersheds

### Eastern Regional Office

#### *Focus areas:*

- Blue Mountain tributaries to the Snake River (Asotin, Tenmile, Alpowa, Deadman, and Meadow Creek watersheds) (Whitman, Garfield, Asotin, Columbia Counties)
- Direct Whitman County Tributaries to the Snake River (Steptoe, Wawawai, Penawawa, Almota Alkali Flat) (Whitman, Garfield, Asotin, Columbia Counties)
- The Walla Walla River Watershed (Walla Walla and Columbia Counties)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2210025.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/About-us/Accountability-transparency/Partnerships-committees/Voluntary-Clean-Water-Guidance-for-Agriculture-Adv>

- Palouse River and tributaries including Spring Flat Creek (Whitman, Spokane, Lincoln, Franklin, and Adams Counties)
- Hangman Creek (Spokane County)
- Little Spokane River Watershed (Pend Oreille, Stevens, Spokane Counties)
- Upper Colville River (Stevens County)

*Watershed evaluation & implementation work:*

Staff spent 11 days in the field evaluating livestock grazing and agricultural tillage impacts to rivers and streams in Eastern Washington watersheds. Watershed evaluations are a key mechanism for implementing regional clean-up plans, both Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) and Straight to Implementation (STI) strategies. They allow us to identify and prioritize pollution problems and then work with landowners to fix them proactively. We identified approximately 200 parcels with livestock or tillage pollution problems.

Approximate number of new priority sites to be contacted in 2024:

Watershed	New Site #	Land-Use
Hangman	8	Livestock and Tillage
Little Spokane	5	Livestock and Tillage
Spring Flat	5	Livestock and Tillage
Upper Colville River	5	Livestock
All Other Watersheds	10	Livestock and Tillage

In addition to these new priority sites, our staff evaluated the status of previously identified sites. Many of these landowners will receive follow-up communication with offers of technical and financial assistance to address ongoing pollution issues.

Our goal is to perform on farm site visits and to develop riparian plans that will ensure we help maintain healthy, productive farms and fully protect water quality. Staff made approximately 50 farm site visits last year. We will make site visits a focus of our work in 2024 as well.

**HANGMAN CREEK IMPLEMENTATION**

In early 2018, Ecology and the Spokane Riverkeeper reached the [Hangman Settlement Agreement](#)<sup>3</sup>. To successfully implement the Hangman Creek Settlement Agreement, we have focused on incentivizing conservation tillage and riparian buffers. Since 2018, staff have prioritized and contacted 93 sites of concern, conducted 130 site visits, and issued 4 enforcement actions. Nineteen sites have implemented BMPs that are fully protective of water quality. A key to our success has been the Hangman Riparian Restoration and Conservation Program. This program was created in partnership with the Spokane

<sup>3</sup>[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/585aee335016e1541642dc0c/t/5ab4456f8a922d7af03cb277/1521763696270/2018+02+06+Spokane+Riverkeeper\\_Ecology+Unsigned.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/585aee335016e1541642dc0c/t/5ab4456f8a922d7af03cb277/1521763696270/2018+02+06+Spokane+Riverkeeper_Ecology+Unsigned.pdf)

Conservation District to support farmers contacted by Ecology. It provides rental rates with long-term contracts for agricultural riparian land taken out of production and planted with native trees and shrubs.

Given the popularity of the program, we continue to provide additional funding to the Spokane Conservation District. Phase 1 of the Hangman Riparian Restoration and Conservation Program contracted 169 acres for riparian restoration along perennial streams in the Hangman watershed (nearly 8 miles), Phase 2 will enroll more than 100 additional acres.

#### *Looking ahead:*

One type of Advanced Restoration Plan, called a Straight-to-Implementation project, is being developed for Spring Flat Creek, Alkali Flat Creek, and Upper Colville River watersheds. The goal is for these watersheds to achieve water quality standards where we have known nonpoint water quality problems, and the fixes are well understood.

- Spring Flat Creek is a small tributary to the South Fork Palouse River
- Alkali Flat Creek is a tributary on the north (Whitman County) side of the Snake River
- Upper Colville River flows north toward Chewelah, Washington in Stevens County

These plans will look to incentivize riparian buffer installation using grant funding and federal cost-share programs. Similar to the Hangman Riparian Restoration and Conservation Program, a project is already funded in the Spring Flat Creek watershed that will provide long term \$300-\$350 per acre contracts where crop ground is converted into buffers. This effort is a partnership with the Palouse and Whitman Conservation Districts.

Eleven additional Ecology Centennial/319 grants for FY 2025 are projected to begin in July of 2024. Once active, we anticipate these grants will allocate \$5.3 million to help us incentivize and implement solutions on the ground throughout Eastern Washington, supporting landowners and clean water.

### **Central Regional Office**

#### *Focus areas:*

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

#### *Watershed evaluation & implementation work:*

Staff in the Central Region are continuing to support the development of TMDLs and other water quality cleanup plans throughout our focal watersheds.

The Wide Hollow Creek Temperature TMDL continues to make progress. We are preparing the draft report for review.

The study plan for the Bacteria Water Cleanup Project in the White Salmon River has entered the planned second year of data collection, with the Environmental Assessment Program continuing to collect data through December 2024 to identify potential pollution sources and associated land uses. This information will support water cleanup efforts and help prioritize projects to address bacteria

contamination in the watershed. Nonpoint staff are conducting outreach in the watershed to support this work.

Nonpoint efforts in the Bonaparte Creek Watershed in Okanogan County are ongoing; this watershed has been prioritized for the development of an Advanced Restoration Plan, likely a Straight to Implementation Project. Staff are reaching out to the local stakeholders in the Bonaparte/Okanogan watershed and will conduct watershed evaluations to familiarize themselves with the land use and pollution sources of the watershed.

We continue to coordinate with conservation districts to address bacteria and temperature water quality impairments. Ecology staff are implementing the Wilson Creek (Kittitas County) and Granger Drain (Yakima County) TMDLs, including landowner outreach and surface water monitoring. Both projects seek to lower sediment transport and the associated contaminants being transported from agricultural lands into tributaries feeding the Yakima River. Additional efforts and monitoring in these waterways are being coordinated with local watershed partners.

#### *Looking ahead:*

Ecology's Central Region Office is in a building phase and excited to be bringing in new staff to support our water quality cleanup efforts. In the second half of 2023, we added two TMDL water cleanup project leads. Additionally, we are currently recruiting for two vacant nonpoint positions and look forward to filling those roles.

The implementation plan for Upper Naches and Cowiche Creek Temperature TMDL Plan is under development. Our staff are currently talking with partners in the watershed about implementation activities to address nonpoint pollution sources and to increase stream shading.

Seven additional Ecology Centennial/319 grants for FY 2025 are projected to begin in July of 2024. Once active, we anticipate these grants will allocate \$2.7 million to help us incentivize and implement solutions on the ground throughout Central Washington, supporting landowners and clean water.

## Southwest Regional Office

#### *Focus areas:*

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

#### *Watershed evaluation & implementation work:*

Our three new nonpoint staff members have now completed over 6 months on the job and are fully immersed in our watershed work. That brings us to four Nonpoint Source Pollution Control and Water Quality Specialists working throughout the SWRO. We are now conducting proactive watershed evaluations and are back in our local watersheds. We have mailing out 24 Technical Assistance letters so far this year.

Concerted efforts were made to address nonpoint pollution sources in the Enumclaw Plateau watersheds, including Boise, Pussyfoot, and Second Creeks. Strategic partner coordination led to quarterly meetings and sharing water quality monitoring data among Tribal, federal, state, and local stakeholders. Staff outreach in this watershed has included developing Spanish-translated materials, using Ecology's phone translation services, and coordinating a site visit with the local Conservation District and an in-person translator.

Comprehensive efforts in the Skokomish Valley & Annas Bay watersheds aim to reduce nonpoint sources of bacteria pollution. One such effort is an ongoing attempt to work with a large landowner in the Skokomish valley. Since initial contact in 2001, nonpoint staff have repeatedly informed site contacts of the water quality impacts resulting from allowing livestock to access waterways, such as the impact of manure on water quality and degraded streamside vegetation.

The Greater Key Peninsula we had focused efforts to reduce nonpoint sources of bacterial pollution originating from agricultural activities. Watershed evaluations identified and prioritized three new sites of concern.

In the Eld Inlet, Henderson Inlet, & Nisqually Reach, quarterly partner meetings facilitated collaborative efforts, while complaint responses led to the referral of four sites to local partners for further action. Additionally, watershed evaluations identified and prioritized three new sites of concern. Technical Assistance letters have been sent, and we are working to connect these property owners with needed resources.

In the Lacamas Creek Watershed, five new sites were identified during watershed evaluations. In the East Fork Lewis River Watershed, focused efforts during the reporting period aimed to address temperature and bacteria impairments. Eight new sites were identified and received Technical Assistance letters.

Staff continue to follow up on Environmental Report Tracking System (ERTS) complaints. Through 2024 thus far, staff has received 93 complaints, of which 23 have required follow-up action.

#### *Looking ahead:*

Looking ahead, we are planning to add a new focal watershed: the Deschutes River, Percival Creek, & Budd Inlet Tributaries. These waterbodies are impaired for bacteria, temperature, dissolved oxygen, and nutrients. We see great potential to coordinate with partners in this new focal watershed. As staff incorporate this watershed into their work, we will transition out of proactive watershed work in Ohop Creek, a tributary to the Nisqually River. The Nisqually Land Trust now owns a significant portion of the watershed, with plans to continue restoring lands in the valley. Given that there are limited actions remaining, nonpoint staff will continue to respond to ERTS in the area and communicate with partners but will take a less active role. This will allow staff to focus on watersheds with more opportunity for nonpoint solutions going forward.

SWRO is recruiting for a Nonpoint Source Pollution Control and Water Quality Specialist (ES4) and we look forward to filling this position. Additionally, we are preparing to recruit for a nonpoint education and outreach specialist to support outreach activities, efforts to engage with landowners and collaborate with local partners.

Six additional Ecology Centennial/319 grants for FY 2025 are projected to begin in July of 2024. Once active, we anticipate these grants will allocate \$2.6 million to help us incentivize and implement solutions on the ground throughout Southwest Washington, supporting landowners and clean water.

## Northwest Regional Office

### *Focal Areas:*

- Padilla Bay Tributaries (Skagit County)
- Drayton Harbor (Whatcom County)
- Samish Bay (Skagit County)
- Snohomish River (Snohomish County)
- Lower Skagit River and South Skagit Bay (Skagit County)
- Nooksack River (Whatcom County)

### *Watershed evaluation & implementation work:*

In the Snohomish River watershed, nonpoint staff work closely with local stakeholders to implement the watershed's TMDLs. Through visual watershed evaluations, staff identified properties contributing nonpoint pollution and contacted 10 properties with offers of technical assistance. Seven of those ten properties have since worked with local partners to implement BMPs (including tree planting) or make management changes to protect water quality.

In cooperation with Whatcom County partners, through the Whatcom Clean Water Program (WCWP), nonpoint staff sent multiple joint Technical Assistance letters to landowners. By partnering with other entities, these letters offer technical and financial assistance opportunities to landowners to make needed improvements. At a heavily saturated property within the Nooksack River watershed where livestock had access to surface water, following two Technical Assistance letters staff successfully worked with a property owner to exclude livestock from surface water.

Within the broader Skagit River watershed, staff have sent 17 Technical Assistance letters to properties within priority watersheds and will continue to work with these properties to provide technical and financial assistance to implement necessary best management practices to address nonpoint pollution. Staff have identified 25-30 sites of concern during seasonal wet weather evaluations. Specifically, within the Lower Skagit watershed, six Technical Assistance letters were sent to four landowners; of those four, three have begun to address practices leading to nonpoint pollution.

Staff have continued to work with several properties on the Kitsap Peninsula; we have sent warning letters to two properties, and thus far one has taken steps to address water quality concerns by constructing a new manure storage bin and excluding livestock from the riparian zone. Staff will continue to provide technical assistance to these landowners to address ongoing water quality concerns.

### *Looking ahead:*

Of the 10 properties identified in the Snohomish River watershed, three still need to address nonpoint pollution.

Within the Nooksack River watershed, staff continue ongoing efforts to work with small property owners to address water quality impacts stemming from livestock access to waterways, through implementation of BMPs such as exclusion fencing and riparian buffers.

Staff will continue to coordinate with local partners to identify pollution sources, contact landowners, and improve livestock management practices in our watersheds. Within the California Creek and Friday Creek watersheds in Whatcom County, 12-15 sites have been identified as needing technical assistance.

NWRO is also in a growing phase. We plan to hire five positions in the upcoming months and are looking forward to once again operating at full capacity.

Nine additional Ecology Centennial/319 grants for FY 2025 are projected to begin in July of 2024. Once active, we anticipate these grants will allocate \$2.6 million to help us incentivize and implement solutions on the ground throughout Northwest Washington, supporting landowners and clean water.