

Ecology Updates for the Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee



October 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](#)¹ (Nonpoint Plan) outlines Washington State's approach for addressing water quality impacts from nonpoint sources of pollution. This plan describes how the state meets Clean Water Act requirements which ensures we remain eligible 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. The plan covers what Ecology is doing as well as what other state and local agencies and groups are doing to protect and restore water quality. After a period for early informal engagement with Tribes, we have now transitioned to collaborating with other state agencies that intersect with this work.

Along with the Nonpoint Plan, eight remaining chapters of the [Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture](#)² (CWG) are due December 31, 2025. We will continue to work with the advisory workgroup to develop these chapters. Agriculture stakeholders are a key part of cleaning up watersheds and improving water quality and their input is essential.

We plan to share drafted CWG chapters as they are available and look forward to receiving feedback as a part of the Nonpoint Plan comment period. We anticipate a public comment period summer 2025. To receive updates or learn more about Washington's Nonpoint Plan, contact us at nonpoint@ecy.wa.gov.

Nonpoint Program Statewide Coordination

In September, the Nonpoint Program held an internal Nonpoint Workshop, gathering together staff from across the state for three days of relationship-building and learning in Spokane. The agenda included Nonpoint Plan updates, incorporating environmental justice, voluntary and regulatory compliance strategies, as well as a field tour with the Spokane CD through the Hangman watershed. We hope to hold these statewide workshops every-other-year.

We also intend to hold annual trainings for new staff (one on each side of the state), during the wet season when watershed evaluations occur, to cover the work process, tools, and resources of nonpoint field staff. Our goal is to continue to promote best practice consistency across the state.

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

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

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)
- 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:

To support our ongoing work in priority watersheds, we recently hired a new Nonpoint Education and Outreach Specialist to aid our community outreach efforts and partner relationships.

Staff spent 18 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](#)³ (TMDLs) and [Straight to Implementation](#)⁴ (STI) strategies. They allow us to identify and prioritize pollution problems and then work with landowners to fix them proactively. We identified approximately 145 parcels with livestock or tillage pollution problems in our priority watersheds and contacted 29 of those sites to offer technical and financial assistance.

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

Watershed	New Site #	Land-Use
Hangman	5	Livestock and Tillage
Little Spokane	5	Livestock and Tillage
Spring Flat	5	Livestock and Tillage
Upper Colville River	5	Livestock
All Other Watersheds	9	Livestock and Tillage

In addition to these new priority sites, our staff evaluated the status of previously identified sites. Approximately 20 additional technical and financial assistance letters will be sent this fall to address ongoing pollution issues.

³ <https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/water-quality/water-improvement/straight-to-implementation>

⁴ <https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/water-quality/water-improvement/straight-to-implementation>

Staff have made more than 20 site visits so far this year and site visits will be a focus of our work ahead. While most problem sites can be fixed proactively by working directly with the landowners, we also anticipate that 2-3 existing problems will be identified for formal enforcement within the next six months. Before considering formal enforcement, we follow a three-step process that typically includes at least two technical assistance letters and a warning letter, in addition to numerous site visits and phone calls. Sites identified are those where we have made multiple contacts (including at least 3 letters) and WQ problems have not been fixed.

Hangman Creek implementation

In early 2018, Ecology and the Spokane Riverkeeper reached the [Hangman Settlement Agreement](#)⁵. 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 99 sites of concern, conducted 137 site visits, and issued 5 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, created in partnership with the Spokane 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. Combined, these two phases are receiving \$5 million from Ecology.

Additional funding is being pursued in cooperation with the Spokane CD, Spokane Tribe, the Lands Council, and Trout Unlimited to support more willing landowners. We are approaching nearly 400 acres of implemented and/or planned riparian forest buffer in the Hangman Creek watershed.

Spring Flat Creek implementation

Spring Flat Creek is a small tributary to the South Fork Palouse River in the Palouse River Watershed. The final Straight to Implementation (STI) strategy for Spring Flat Creek was published in August 2024 and submitted to EPA for review. We have two funding agreements in place with the Palouse Conservation District and Whitman Conservation District to support the STI.

- The Spring Flat Creek Buffer Incentive Program, uses Direct Implementation Funding to provide rental rates with long-term contracts for agricultural riparian land taken out of production and planted with native trees and shrubs. This project is modeled after the Hangman Creek project and has already 25 acres of buffer planned for implementation over the next several months.
- The second agreement, supported through Centennial Funds, helps landowners implement a variety of Best Management Practices on their agricultural lands. We have several site visits planned with Spring Flat Creek landowners this fall who were contacted in 2023 and 2024.

⁵https://static1.squarespace.com/static/585aee335016e1541642dc0c/t/5ab4456f8a922d7af03cb277/1521763696270/2018+02+06+Spokane+Riverkeeper_Ecology+Unsigned.pdf

Little Spokane River implementation

We continue to implement the [Little Spokane River multiparameter TMDL](#)⁶ via watershed evaluations and technical/financial assistance. We are currently working with 10 livestock and crop production properties in the watershed. Recognizing agriculture is only one of several pollution sources, we are also working with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife on upgrades to the Little Spokane Fish Hatchery that will reduce discharges of nutrient pollution by more than 50%.

We look to provide many different options for landowners within the region to protect riparian areas. With the assistance of Ecology 319 funding, the Inland Northwest Land Conservancy acquired 27 acres of riparian property in the Little Spokane Watershed. This property acquisition is part of a larger acquisition of 1,066 acres along the Little Spokane River focused on long-term protection and restoration of riparian areas. This effort helps support maintaining dissolved oxygen, temperature, and pH levels during the critical summer season.

Looking ahead:

Straight to Implementation projects, a type of Advanced Restoration Plan, are being developed for 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. Similar to our other watershed work, these plans will look to incentivize riparian buffer installation using grant funding and federal cost-share programs, in partnership with conservation districts.

- 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

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:

We recently (August 2024) hired two new nonpoint staff to work on nonpoint field work that will increase our effectiveness. 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

⁶ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-improvement/Total-Maximum-Daily-Load-process/Directory-of-improvement-projects/Little-Spokane-River-DO-and-pH-TMDL>

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:

Nonpoint staff are beginning to work within the Lower Yakima Ground Water Management Area to implement activities and coordinate with the Yakima Health District and the South Yakima Conservation District.

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.

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)
- Deschutes River, Percival Creek, & Budd Inlet Tributaries
- Oakland Bay and Johns Creek (Mason County)
- Skokomish Valley & Annas Bay (Mason County)
- Lacamas Creek (Clark County)

Watershed evaluation & implementation work:

To support our ongoing work in priority watersheds, we are happy to announce that we just hired a new Nonpoint Education and Outreach Specialist to support our community outreach efforts.

In the Enumclaw Plateau watersheds, including Boise, Pussyfoot, and Second Creeks, strategic partner coordination includes quarterly meetings and sharing water quality monitoring data among Tribal, federal, state, and local stakeholders. One property in the Pussyfoot Creek watershed received a warning letter. Staff have made multiple attempts to provide outreach and technical assistance to help this property owner.

Work continues in the Skokomish Valley & Annas Bay watersheds to reduce nonpoint sources of bacteria pollution. This includes an ongoing effort 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. On Aug. 1, 2024, Ecology issued an administrative order requiring the landowner to implement several corrective actions to address ongoing nonpoint pollution concerns.

Meanwhile, in the Deschutes River, Percival Creek, and Budd Inlet Tributaries, which are impaired for bacteria, temperature, dissolved oxygen, and nutrients, staff have collaborated with local partners to identify 10 sites of concern, all of which have received technical assistance letters.

Additionally, in the Deschutes Watershed, staff issued two warning letters. The first was in response to an Environmental Report Tracking System (ERTS) complaint. The property owner had dug a trench on their land and was accepting waste from a nearby dairy. The trench is located within the wellhead protection area of a community water system, necessitating urgent follow-up. Further concerns regarding water quality at this site include improper manure application practices, which pose a risk of nutrient runoff and contamination of nearby water bodies. The other warning letter was issued after numerous attempts to provide technical assistance to a property where livestock were observed with direct access to surface waters, leading to fecal bacteria contamination and streambank erosion. The site also lacked adequate streamside vegetation and had livestock grazing on saturated pastures.

The Greater Key Peninsula we had focused efforts to reduce nonpoint sources of bacterial pollution originating from agricultural activities. Staff continue to work with three new sites of concern identified earlier this year.

Staff continue to follow up on Environmental Report Tracking System (ERTS) complaints. Since June, staff have received 30 new complaints, of which 11 have required follow-up action.

Looking ahead:

SWRO is actively recruiting for a Nonpoint Source Pollution Control and Water Quality Specialist (ES3), a role that will support ongoing efforts in reducing nonpoint pollution sources.

SWRO recently received two Direct Implementation Fund (DIF) awards. The first, \$110,000, was awarded to King County for a riparian planting project on Boise Creek near Enumclaw, a high-priority area for the Lower White River pH TMDL and Puyallup Bacteria TMDL. The second, \$297,000, was awarded to the Clark Conservation District to create riparian forests and implement agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) along Lacamas Creek and several unnamed tributaries, all of which are impaired for temperature, bacteria, and dissolved oxygen in WRIA 28.

Northwest Regional Office

Focal Areas:

- 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)

- French Creek (Snohomish County)

Watershed evaluation & implementation work:

We are committed to supporting nonpoint efforts in the region as we bring on new nonpoint staff.

Ecology has continued to support technical assistance efforts from other agencies (i.e. WDFW, Skagit County Planning and Development Services) for a site in the Hansen Creek watershed (Lower Skagit Tributary) that has converted land uses from livestock grazing to berry production. In doing so, the property owners removed several hundred feet of ditch line vegetation, dredged new ditches and exposed the spoils to erosion, degraded riparian vegetation and drainage through a wetland. Ecology sent a Technical Assistance letter in April 2024 and to date has not received a direct response from the owners. As new field staff come on board, contacting the owner to prevent sediment delivery to the ditches and create a plan to restore the riparian vegetation will be a priority.

Throughout the summer, during a time of staff vacancies, the nonpoint supervisor and Water Quality Section Manager have been participating in various coordination groups across the region to lay the groundwork for field staff collaboration and receive updates on sites with new or on-going pollution issues. This includes the Whatcom Clean Water Program, Skagit County Pollution Identification and Correction Program (PIC) and Lower Stillaguamish PIC Water Quality Subgroup.

The region receives a high volume of ERTS, where the nonpoint supervisor is included on the follow-up referral list. Until nonpoint field staff are in place, the supervisor is working with TMDL leads to help ensure the appropriate local or state entity is notified of the complaint. This approach will continue until we fill the nonpoint field positions.

Formerly, the region's bacterial pollution identification work occurred through temporary staff positions funded by the National Estuary Program's Shellfish Grant. Ecology has received permanent, sustainable funding for two additional nonpoint staff and will continue to work with our Shellfish Protection District partners in the Northwest Region to holistically address nonpoint sources of pollution.

We recently produced an informational [focus sheet](#)⁷ on orange water that has been observed for many years in French Creek, a tributary to the Snohomish River. Based on available data, the team concluded that the water discoloration is likely linked to blue-green algae, that at times can release toxins harmful to humans and animals. The TMDL lead for the watershed shared the focus sheet and blog with local partners, which resulted in the local newspaper coverage.

Looking ahead:

Two of the four vacant nonpoint positions are expected to be filled by November. We plan to fill the second set of nonpoint vacancies by spring 2025.

Development of the Drayton Harbor Bacteria TMDL is on-going. Once that is finalized, the TMDL lead will share the draft report with external partners and follow up with meetings towards the end of 2024. After an official public comment period, Ecology expects to submit the report to EPA for approval during the second quarter of 2025.

⁷ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/2410021.pdf>

For the Fiscal Year 2025, Ecology's Water Quality Program funded more than \$1 million in grants to improve the water quality in some of NWRO's focus watersheds. We are funding education and outreach and financial incentives to support Snohomish County's Savvy Septic Program (\$500,000), as well as instream and riparian restoration for streams with known temperature and dissolved oxygen impairments. Snohomish Conservation District received funding (\$304,000) for restoration efforts in the Pilchuck River, a waterbody with a temperature and dissolved oxygen TMDL. Adopt A Stream Foundation received funding (\$250,000) to help restore a portion of the West Fork Quilceda Creek, a tributary to the Lower Snohomish River with dissolved oxygen impairments.