Water Quality Updates for the Agriculture Advisory Committee

October 2025 Updates

2025 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 the state meets Clean Water Act requirements, ensuring 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 draft 2025 Nonpoint Plan[1], we coordinated with state and local partners involved in this work, including other agencies, conservation districts, and Tribes, to ensure accurate reflection of efforts across the state. We accepted public comments from May 22 to August 29, 2025, with an informational webinar on June 11. The 2025 Nonpoint Plan Update Reading Guide [2] provides a summary of updates. With the comment period now closed, we are reviewing responses to inform changes to the draft plan. We received 64 comments, which can be viewed online[3]. We are also working on our response to comments document.

Along with the Nonpoint Plan, the eight remaining chapters of the Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture (CWG) are due to EPA on December 31, 2025. We continue to coordinate with advisory workgroups, including representatives from other state agencies and agriculture and conservation experts, to develop these chapters.

We are posting draft chapters as they are ready, with six currently available for review and comment. The remaining two chapters will be available the week of October 20. We will share an announcement through our email list[4] once they are posted. We will accept comments on draft guidance chapters until November 21, 2025. Visit the guidance webpage[5] for draft materials and more information.

Satisfactory Progress Determination from EPA

Every year we submit an annual report to EPA to outline the efforts and progress of our nonpoint program. EPA evaluates our report using the standards detailed in the CWA 319 grant guidelines, as well as the strategies and milestones outlined in our current (2022) Nonpoint Plan. In July, we received a Satisfactory Progress Determination from the EPA. Our 2024 Annual Report[6] is now available online.

For more information about our nonpoint program[7] or to get in touch, email nonpoint@ecy.wa.gov.

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[1] https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2510040.html
[2] https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/2510042.pdf
[3] https://wq.ecology.commentinput.com/comment/extra?id=7sdJeBRtM
[4] https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WAECY/subscriber/new?topic_id=WAECY_153
[5] https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/plans-policies/plan-to-control-nonpoint-sources-of-pollution?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery
[6] https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2510064.html
[7] https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/water-quality/nonpoint-pollution

Work in the Watersheds

Ecology's nonpoint staff are based in our regional and field offices. This allows staff to be connected with partner organizations, active on the ground, and have an increased awareness and involvement in local water quality issues.

Eastern Regional Office

For additional information about our work in the Eastern region, please contact Mitch Redfern at mitch.redfern@ecy.wa.gov.

Focus areas:

Eastern region's focus areas remain the same as previous years, with the addition of Hawk Creek – where we have begun developing a Straight to Implementation (STI) Plan[8].

- 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)
- The Walla Walla River Watershed (Walla Walla and Columbia Counties)
- Palouse River and tributaries prioritizing Spring Flat Creek subbasin of the Palouse (Whitman, Spokane, Lincoln, Franklin, and Adams Counties)
- Hangman Creek (Spokane and Whitman Counties)
- Little Spokane River Watershed (Pend Oreille, Stevens, Spokane Counties)
- Upper Colville River (Stevens County)
- Hawk Creek (Lincoln County)

Watershed evaluation & implementation work:

Staff spent 14 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 cleanup plans, both Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)[9] and Straight to Implementation strategies. They allow us to identify and prioritize pollution problems and work with landowners to fix them. We identified approximately 158 sites with livestock or tillage pollution problems in our priority watersheds and contacted 34 of those sites to offer technical and financial assistance (Table 1).

Table 1. Approximate number of new priority sites to be contacted in 2025

Watershed	New Site #	Land-Use
Hangman	9	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

[8] https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/water-quality/water-improvement/straight-to-implementation
[9] https://ecology.wa.gov/water-shorelines/water-quality/water-improvement/total-maximum-daily-load-process

In addition to these new priority sites, our staff evaluated the status of previously identified sites. We plan to send approximately 20 additional technical and financial assistance letters this fall to address ongoing pollution issues.

Staff have made more than 15 site visits so far this year and site visits will continue to be a focus of our work ahead. While most sites of concern can be fixed by working directly with the landowners to provide technical and/or financial assistance, we also anticipate that 2-3 existing priority sites 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 (TA) letters and a warning letter, in addition to numerous site visits and phone calls. Sites identified for formal enforcement are those where we have made multiple contacts (including at least 3 letters) and progress has not been made.

Hangman Creek implementation

In early 2018, Ecology and the Spokane Riverkeeper reached the Hangman Settlement Agreement. To implement the Hangman Creek Settlement Agreement, we focus on incentivizing conservation tillage and riparian buffers. Since 2018, we have prioritized and contacted 109 sites of concern, conducted 140 site visits, and issued 5 enforcement actions. 57 sites have implemented or are currently implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) that are fully protective of water quality. A key to success is 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 & 2 of the Hangman Riparian Restoration and Conservation Program contracted 380 acres for riparian restoration along 33.2 miles of stream in the Hangman watershed. Combined, these two phases have received $6.37 million from Ecology. Additional funding is being pursued in cooperation with the Spokane Conservation District to support more willing landowners.

Spring Flat Creek implementation

Spring Flat Creek is a tributary to the South Fork Palouse River in the Palouse River Watershed. The final Straight to Implementation strategy for Spring Flat Creek was accepted by EPA in April 2025. We have two funding agreements in place with the Palouse Conservation District and Whitman Conservation District to support this work:

- The Spring Flat Creek Buffer Incentive Program provides 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.
- The second agreement, supported through Centennial Funds, helps landowners implement a variety of BMPs on their agricultural lands.

Landowners and producers have not yet used our financial assistance to implement BMPs – which includes $300 per acre for riparian land and an additional $50 per acre for land meeting full site-potential tree height. Actions taken to build understanding and interest in the funding opportunities include:

- Meeting with the community to listen to concerns, take questions and provide information.
- Working with Palouse Conservation District to design and begin implementing a robust monitoring effort, which is publicly available.
- Beginning a planning effort to conduct more outreach and education.

- Continuing site visits, offering technical and financial assistance, and communicating regularly with interested parties.

Ecology is committed to working with the community to improve water quality and providing financial support to landowners to get BMPs on the ground.

Outreach and Education

Outreach and education are critical to our efforts, complementing site visits and partner coordination. Staff participate in youth education events, including WaterFest at the Doris Morrison Learning Center (Spokane County Water Resources), Trout Release Days and the Trout in the Classroom program, and visiting schools. Staff participate at community events including the Spokane County Fair and local conferences/symposiums (Spokane River Forum, the Conservation Commission Science HUB, and the Spokane Conservation District's Farm and Food Symposium). This past summer, an interpretive sign was installed overlooking a recent riparian restoration project along Little Hangman Creek, and a mailer about healthy streams was sent out to landowners living in the Hangman Creek watershed.

Looking ahead:

We continue to prioritize and explore outreach and collaborative work with implementation partners across our focal watersheds. Straight to Implementation projects are in development for Alkali Flat Creek, Upper Colville River, Hawk Creek, and Chamokane Creek watersheds. The goal is for these watersheds to achieve clean water 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
- Hawk Creek flows north through Lincoln County into Lake Roosevelt of the Columbia River
- Chamokane Creek flows south through Stevens County, into the Spokane River

Future outreach efforts in priority watersheds will focus on educating landowners, youth, and the general public about water quality and pollution sources. Strategies anticipated include distributing educational mailers, conducting school programs with hands-on activities, engaging at community events, and participating in conferences to strengthen partnerships.

Central Regional Office

For additional information about our work in the Central region, please contact Mark Peterschmidt at mark.peterschmidt@ecy.wa.gov.

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 continue to support the development of TMDLs and other water quality cleanup plans throughout our focal watersheds. Data collection for the Bacteria Water Cleanup Project in the White Salmon River is complete, with Ecology's Environmental Assessment Program working on data analysis and report development to help 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 ongoing 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 Straight to Implementation Plan. In addition to staff reaching out to the local interested parties in the Bonaparte/Okanogan watershed, outreach efforts include providing outreach in local farmers markets to connect with the watershed community.

We coordinate with conservation districts to address bacteria and temperature water quality impairments. We 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 transported from agricultural lands into Yakima River tributaries. Monitoring in these waterways is done by Ecology staff and local partners. Staff coordinate with irrigation districts and conservation districts for sampling.

Our nonpoint staff are working on nonpoint investigations, inspections, and compliance. Our new staff are following up on nonpoint pollution complaints received through the Environmental Report Tracking System (ERTS), conducting watershed surveys, working to coordinate with sister agencies and partners, working on watershed assessment activities associated with the Lower Yakima Ground Water Management Area, and coordinating with the CAFO permitting team to address concerns in the Central Region. During May through August 2025, nonpoint staff responded to 8 agricultural concerns through the ERTS and issued 2 TA letters.

Looking ahead:

Ecology's Central Region Watershed Unit is working with the most recent water quality assessment and developing long term plans and priorities. The review process considers the number and locations of identified water quality impairments in selecting priority watersheds.

Ecology's combined fund grant cycle for FY 2027 Ecology Centennial/319 grants is underway. Grant management staff are working to review grant applications for the upcoming funding cycle.

Central Region staff have begun a planning process to potentially develop a water cleanup plan to address bacteria water quality impairments in the Klickitat River watershed.

Southwest Regional Office

For additional information about our work in the Southwest region, please contact Gabe Raso at gabe.raso@ecy.wa.gov.

Focus areas:

- Enumclaw Plateau — Boise, Pussyfoot, and Second Creeks (King County)
- East Fork Lewis River (Clark County)
- Willapa Bay (Pacific County)

- Eld Inlet, Henderson Inlet, and Nisqually Reach (Thurston & Pierce Counties)
- Deschutes River, Percival Creek, & Budd Inlet Tributaries (Thurston County)
- Oakland Bay & Johns Creek (Mason County)
- Skokomish Valley & Annas Bay (Mason County)
- Lacamas Creek (Clark County)

Watershed evaluation & implementation work:

We continue to focus on coordinated watershed actions across the Enumclaw Plateau, Boise, Pussyfoot, and Second Creeks. Staff work closely with King Conservation District, King County, and Tribal partners to align technical assistance, restoration, and enforcement activities. During this reporting cycle, 5 new sites were identified, with 50 Technical Assistance letters (TA), 10 Warning Letters (WL), 1 Administrative Order (AO), and 1 penalty issued (for the same site).

An Ecology Direct Implementation Fund (DIF) supporting a riparian restoration project on Boise Creek in Enumclaw is now underway. King County, as the project sponsor, has worked with the landowner to complete cultural resources review and prepare the site by mowing and treating invasive blackberries. Extensive planting is planned for the upcoming planting season in fall 2025 and winter 2026.

In Eld Inlet, Henderson Inlet, and Nisqually Reach, staff focus on bacteria and nutrient sources in shellfish-sensitive waters. Three new sites were identified, and 1 TA was issued. We coordinate with Thurston Conservation District, Thurston County Environmental Health, and the Squaxin Island Tribe.

At Oakland Bay and Johns Creek, 41 new sites were identified, and 7 TAs were sent out. This watershed has a high density of small agricultural operations impacting shellfish resources. Staff work with Mason Conservation District to ensure technical assistance efforts target the highest-risk drainages.

In the Chambers–Clover watershed, 11 new sites were identified with 1 TA issued. Coordination with Pierce Conservation District remains strong, with particular emphasis on agricultural BMPs and restoration on small tributaries feeding Clover Creek.

The Deschutes River, Percival Creek, and Budd Inlet tributaries remain active watersheds for nonpoint work. 10 new sites were identified, and staff issued 17 TAs and 1 AO.

In Lacamas Creek, 6 new sites were identified, with 6 TAs and 1 WL issued. Staff continue to work closely with Clark Conservation District.

In the East Fork Lewis River watershed, 10 new sites were identified, with 8 TAs issued and 1 WL.

For 2025, Willapa Bay was added as a new focus watershed. We are focused on collaboration with local partners including conservation districts and the Department of Health. Willapa Bay is a productive shellfish area, but bacteria pollution from nonpoint sources such as septic systems and livestock manure impair water quality. Given the ecological and economic importance of this watershed, Ecology is prioritizing nonpoint source reduction efforts to protect shellfish beds, public health, and critical habitat.

Outreach and Education

Outreach and education remain central to SWRO's nonpoint program, complementing field inspections and partner coordination. In March, staff participated in the Student Green Congress, where they delivered interactive lessons on watershed pollution and environmental policy for youth ages 9–15 using the Enviroscape model. The following month, staff assisted at the Envirothon, helping facilitate a large-

scale environmental knowledge competition for high school students in partnership with local conservation districts. Later in the summer, Ecology engaged directly with the public at the Thurston County Fair and the Tumwater Falls Fest.

Looking ahead:

As we expand into Willapa Bay, we will begin with site evaluations, technical assistance, and building partnerships with local conservation districts, the Department of Health, and community groups to address bacteria pollution affecting shellfish harvesting and water quality. As part of early outreach, staff will also send a postcard mailer to landowners in the watershed to introduce Ecology's role and encourage participation in voluntary water quality improvements.

Staff will continue targeted watershed evaluations in our focal watersheds. These evaluations will help identify new problem sites and track progress at locations where corrective actions are underway. Some sites may require further enforcement if conditions remain unresolved.

Outreach will remain a key focus. This fall, staff will participate in the Arts Walk at the Puget Sound Estuarium (October 4, 2025), and the Thurston Conservation District Town Hall (November 2025). These events connect Ecology directly with landowners, residents, and students, and strengthen partnerships.

Northwest Regional Office

For additional information about our work in the Northwest region, please contact Jay Fennell at jay.fennell@ecy.wa.gov.

Focus Areas:

- Drayton Harbor (Whatcom County)
- Samish Bay (Skagit County)
- Lower Skagit River and South Skagit Bay (Skagit County)
- Nooksack River (Whatcom County)
- Stillaguamish River (Snohomish County)
- South Skagit Bay (Old Stillaguamish Channel) (Snohomish County)
- Green-Duwamish River Watershed (King County)

General Updates

After a nearly 6-month span of vacancies, we onboarded two full-time nonpoint staff in November 2024. The following 6 months consisted of training and orientation around Ecology's nonpoint processes, work-in-progress from prior staff, and the various multi-interest groups throughout the Puget Sound region in existing priority areas. While successfully onboarding two new staff is an achievement worth celebrating, this was soon followed by a statewide budget freeze, halting further recruitment.

The region has two staff vacancies that will likely remain unfilled for the next 6 months or longer. As a result, we have reduced the number of focus areas to maximize the staff's proactive efforts. The focus areas reflect the watersheds where the prior team were most involved in addressing nonpoint pollution or where watershed partners have expressed a need for continued or increased Ecology involvement. The narrowed focus area impacts the southern portion of the northwest region by temporarily pausing proactive nonpoint pollution control efforts in the French Creek and Snohomish River watersheds. Efforts in the southern portion of the region are focused on supporting the work of partners in the Stillaguamish River and the Green-Duwamish River watersheds.

We've prioritized conducting proactive watershed assessments in the Skagit and Stillaguamish River watersheds since spring 2025, the majority of the field work and evaluations will be completed this fall.

Watershed evaluation & implementation work:

In the Lower Skagit River watershed, staff continue to meet with Skagit County, Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, and Skagit Conservation District to discuss prioritization, coordination, and available financial assistance. Over the course of seven days, staff completed watershed evaluations in the Lower Skagit watershed, identifying 15 new sites and updating information for 10 existing sites.

In Whatcom County, staff work closely with the Whatcom Clean Water Program (WCWP) PIC group, to complete watershed evaluations, wet season site checks, and continue to improve communication and collaboration. Staff involved in the WCWP are working together to develop joint letters for better communication and improved compliance. Together with the WCWP, we participated in the Raspberry Festival. Staff talked about common nonpoint BMPs and the technical and financial assistance available.

After a roughly 6-month lapse in participation due to vacancies, we have resumed Ecology's engagement in partner groups across the region, including the Stillaguamish Technical Advisory Group and Phase IV of the Lower Stillaguamish River Pollution Identification and Correction (PIC) Program.

Staff completed their first watershed evaluations in the Lower Stillaguamish River watershed, identifying 87 sites with nonpoint water quality concerns. Staff identified 41 of the 87 sites as priorities to initiate technical assistance. These sites have exposed livestock manure storage, denuded/compacted pasture conditions, animal access to streams/seasonal drainage pathways, or erosion and exposed soils concerns, combined with observed or potential discharges surface waters. Staff will now further evaluate, establish priorities, and determine a feasible number of sites to contact.

In King County, Kitsap County, and the Snohomish River watershed, Ecology staff are responding to ERTS complaints and participating in partner groups such as the Snohomish Basin Salmon Recovery Forum and the Snoqualmie Watershed Forum. Staff also attend implementation sub-teams for the Sustainable Lands Strategy in both the Stillaguamish and Snohomish River basins.

So far this year, in NWRO staff have received 68 ERTS complaints, 14 related to agriculture. Staff addressed these complaints, conducted three site visits, sent one TA and two ERTS follow-up letters.

Looking ahead:

We will select priority properties to begin sending out TA letters to priority sites of concern, as identified in Lower Skagit tributaries and Stillaguamish River Watershed Evaluations.

Staff will begin planning routes, conducting watershed evaluations to gather site evidence through right-of-way observations in the Drayton Harbor Focus area. Staff will collaborate with the WCWP to assist with wet season windshield surveys in the California Creek focus area, a tributary to Drayton Harbor.

Staff will continue to engage with partner groups, gathering information on partner resources and financial assistance programs. We will continue to explore outreach opportunities to support our partners and implementation efforts.