

Summer 2019 Update to Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee:



The next Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee meeting is on October 17, 2019 in Eastern Washington. We wanted to give the committee an update on the work that Ecology has been doing since the spring meeting in March 2019.

Our Work in Watersheds

At the March Advisory Committee meeting, we shared the watersheds we are focusing on in 2019 (Presentation: [Watershed Evaluations 2019](#)). Across the state we have made good progress on this work. Here are some highlights.

Western Washington:

We are focused on water quality improvement in nine areas:

- Samish
- Nooksack
- Drayton Harbor
- South Skagit Bay
- Portage Bay
- White River near Enumclaw
- South Sound (Key Peninsula, Eld Inlet and Henderson Inlet)
- Newaukum River near Onalaska
- East Fork Lewis River near La Center

Since the March meeting, we sent outreach postcards to livestock owners in Skagit County (Samish River and Padilla Bay watersheds), and Whatcom County (Nooksack and Drayton Harbor watersheds). The postcards are part of a larger outreach effort (which include complementary work by Skagit and Whatcom Counties, Washington State Department of Agriculture, Washington Department of Health, and the local Conservation Districts) and encouraged good spring pasture management. We are planning a similar effort this fall that will focus on manure management in advance of the fall rains. This work will also represent a coordinated effort inclusive of other agencies and organizations.

We sent sixteen technical assistance letters, and conducted four site visits with livestock owners in the Nooksack, Padilla Bay and Samish watersheds. Warning letters were sent to two separate livestock producers in the Padilla Bay watershed after several years of trying to work with the landowners.

In March we participated in the Small Farm Expo hosted by Whatcom and in April we attended a meeting of the Whatcom County Cattlemen's Association in an effort to build relationships with livestock producers in the county.

Out of Ecology's Southwest Regional Office (which covers the White River, South Sound, Newaukum River and East Fork Lewis River watersheds) we have sent nine technical assistance letters during the last three months. In the East Fork Lewis River watershed, we mailed outreach and education flyers to landowners in the McCormick Creek drainage. In that watershed we completed ten site visits with landowners to talk about our work and the resources available to them to address water quality issues.

We have participated in several outreach events including a public workshop hosted by the Pierce Conservation District on the Key Peninsula (“Starting or Growing Your Farm”), and WSU Clark County Small Acreage Expo in Vancouver. We also hosted a public town hall meeting for residents interested in learning more about the East Fork Lewis River project.

Eastern Washington:

We are focused on water quality improvement efforts in five areas:

- Hangman Creek
- Palouse River and tributaries
- Tributaries to the Middle Snake River (Blue Mountain tributaries)
- Tributaries to the Middle Snake River (Whitman County tributaries)
- Yakima River and tributaries

Since the March meeting we completed our annual evaluations in Hangman Creek, Palouse River and the Middle Snake River tributaries watersheds. Technical and financial assistance letters were sent to ten tillage sites and five livestock sites within the Hangman Creek watershed. An additional ten technical and financial assistance letters went to sites in the Palouse River and Middle Snake River tributaries watersheds. Our goal is to set up site visits with interested producers to work with them and their local conservation districts to put plans together and secure financial assistance to protect water quality.

We will also be sending out ‘Thank You’ letters to producers that we contacted last year that have taken steps forward to protect water quality! We performed site visits with fourteen of the fifteen sites contacted in 2018 and several significant water quality projects are currently under development as a result of last year’s effort.

In the Yakima River watershed we have been working in several tributaries to connect with partners and work on TMDL implementation projects. Our nonpoint staff have primarily focused on responding to complaints, providing technical assistance in coordination with conservation districts, and are currently working with the Kittitas County Water Purveyors to address water quality complaints regarding irrigation waters.

Update on Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture

At the Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture Advisory Committee meeting in March 2019, the group discussed the upcoming draft of the Tillage and Residue Management Volume of the Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture and the next set practices Ecology will be working on with the advisory group.

We appreciate all the time and effort advisory group members have dedicated to this project. We have continued to make progress and expect to wrap up a *draft* of the Tillage and Residue Management guidance with the advisory group and will make it available to stakeholders and the public for review.

The last Guidance Advisory Group meetings were held on July 16 and 17. These meetings focused on best management practices (BMPs) for Animal/Forage & Pasture Management, Riparian Protection, Animal Confinement/Management, and Manure Handling and Storage.

Drought Declaration

Due to low snowpack and exceptionally low precipitation over parts of the state, the Department of Ecology has declared drought in 27 watersheds. Ecology published an emergency rule – WAC 173-167 – establishing the eligibility criteria for emergency drought relief grants. These grants are only available to irrigation districts,

conservation districts and other public entities. The maximum grant amount is \$350,000 with a 50/50 cost share requirement. The goal of the grant program is to help water users avoid hardships related to water shortage conditions. More information available at ecology.wa.gov/drought or contact jeff.marti@ecy.wa.gov.

Next Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee Meeting

Our next meeting is on October 17, 2019. It will be held in Eastern Washington. For meeting materials from previous meetings, please visit the [Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee webpage](#).

If you would like more information on this update, please contact Ben Rau at (360) 688-9258 or ben.rau@ecy.wa.gov.