

Summer 2021 Update to Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee:



Since we have not been able to meet in person this year due to Covid-19, we wanted to send a summer update to highlight some of our recent work. We look forward to meeting with you all this fall.

Work in watersheds

Western Washington

We are focused on water quality improvements in these areas:

- Padilla Bay Tributaries
- South Skagit Bay
- Lower Skagit Tributaries
- Stillaguamish
- Drayton Harbor
- Jordan Creek
- Lower Nooksack River
- Samish River
- East Fork Lewis River
- Greater Key Peninsula
- Henderson Inlet, Eld Inlet and Nisqually Reach
- Enumclaw Plateau (Boise, Pussyfoot and Second Creeks)
- Skokomish River

Padilla Bay Tributaries

Following the completion of the [Padilla Bay Fecal Coliform TMDL](#) in late 2020, Northwest regional staff began working with industrial stormwater permittees in the Padilla Bay tributaries that may be contributing bacteria to this watershed, which has a combination of agricultural, residential, and industrial land uses. Bacteria monitoring is included in one NPDES Individual Industrial Permit and Ecology is working to help the other permittees evaluate their sites and identify potential bacterial pollution sources on a voluntary basis.

Watershed evaluations in South Skagit Bay

The Northwest team's [South Skagit Bay Watershed Evaluation work](#) includes meeting virtually with the advisory group to discuss water quality monitoring results and our proposed monitoring plan revisions. We will retain a handful of the past sites and expand monitoring to the Old Stillaguamish Channel Watershed, which will also help the Stillaguamish PIC III program develop its monitoring program.

Education and outreach in the Lower Skagit

After its finalization in early 2020, we began [implementation of the Lower Skagit River Temperature TMDL](#). Promoting riparian restoration through education and outreach is one focus of implementation. After surveying Skagit County residents Northwest Regional staff

developed a [Skagit Valley's Warming Waters](#) Storymap, which was released during a Skagit Water Weeks event. Staff are also developing four water quality related videos that we hope to complete by early Fall 2021. Ecology is also working with Skagit stakeholders on the next phase of our community based social marketing work to promote riparian restoration and this pilot work will be useful in shaping our efforts to engage communities in other parts of the state.



[Stillaguamish Pollution Identification and Correction \(PIC\)](#)

We are participating in the new [Stillaguamish PIC III program](#), which is now being led by Snohomish Conservation District. We also began working with Snohomish County, Snohomish CD, Snohomish Health District, and the Tulalip Tribes to better characterize potential bacteria pollution from onsite septic systems adjacent to the Old Stillaguamish Channel and the Snohomish County portion of Port Susan. By examining health district records and mapping the location and characteristics of onsite septic systems adjacent to surface waters, we facilitated a discussion of pollution risks and next steps for coordination in examining potentially polluting systems.

[Technical Assistance Efforts in Southwest Regional Office:](#)

Nonpoint specialists in our Southwest Regional Office sent over 500 letters to landowners in the Ohop Valley, Skokomish River, Henderson Inlet, Filucy Bay and Vaughn Bay watersheds. From this outreach, 35 landowners responded asking for more information or site visits and nonpoint staff have completed 10 site visits. Staff have focused on high-risk sites in the Puget Sound, Hood Canal, and Strait of Juan de Fuca watersheds and have sent eight technical assistance letters to address concerns through implementing BMPs on properties that drain to shellfish growing areas. Staff are working closely with conservation districts and Lewis County partners to address complaints and concerns in the Lower Columbia watersheds, where staff have sent 13 letters to provide assistance in addressing water quality concerns.

[Eastern and Central Washington](#)

We are focused on water quality improvements in these areas:

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

Watershed Evaluations

We completed our annual watershed evaluations in Hangman Creek, Palouse River, Middle Snake River, and Walla Walla River watersheds in March and early April, 2021. Technical and financial assistance letters were sent out to 10 livestock water quality concern sites across the Palouse River, Middle Snake River, and Walla Walla River watersheds and 17 letters in the Hangman and Little Spokane watersheds. Our goal is to set up site visits with these producers and work with them and local conservation districts to develop plans and secure financial assistance to protect water quality.

Hangman Creek

Since 2018, Ecology staff have contacted 48 tillage and livestock sites and have been in active communication with 36 landowners in the Hangman Creek watershed. Ecology has worked with landowners and partners to implement BMPs on six priority sites. Cumulatively, these six tillage and livestock projects have resulted in 10,600' of exclusion fencing, 21.3 acres of riparian plantings, 2 heavy use areas, 1 livestock crossing, 2 manure storage structures, and 3 off-stream watering facilities. Approximately \$5,117,737 in Ecology grant and loan funds have been made available since 2018 for addressing nonpoint source pollution within the watershed.

Direct Implementation Fund Projects

We utilized unspent 319 funds this spring to implement projects at three long-standing water quality problem sites. One site along the Palouse River resulted in over 5,000 feet of new livestock fencing. We also identified a site on the Colville River, where thousands of native tree and shrubs were planted along the riverbanks. The third site was located on the Little Spokane River and involved installing nearly a half mile of riparian exclusion fencing, planting native plants, and implementing two stockwater tanks and a livestock crossing.

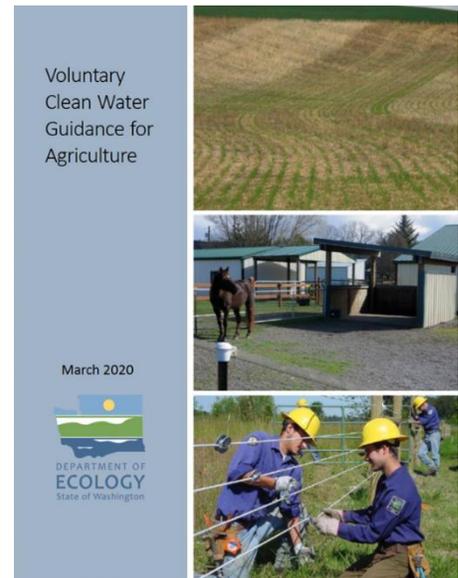
Partnership in the Central Regional Office

Ecology has partnered with the City of Ellensburg to address the [Wilson Creek Sub-basin Bacteria TMDL](#). The City is actively working to reduce soil and debris from their storm drain system and performs regular bacteria sampling in several locations on Wilson Creek.

In the lower Yakima Valley, Ecology has partnered with the Roza-Sunnyside Board of Joint Control on implementing the [Granger Drain Bacteria \(FC\) TMDL implementation](#). Over the last two years, bacteria levels have reduced significantly due to effective management of irrigation resources, quick responses to problems, and new BMPs, including a recently installed check dam to reduce sediment transport. The Granger Drain discharges directly into the lower Yakima River and this effort is assisting in reduced suspended sediments and bacteria in the lower Yakima River.

Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture

We continue our work developing the Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture, a technical resource for agricultural producers that describes Ecology's recommended best management practices (BMPs) to protect water quality. In March 2020, we completed our first draft chapter focused on [Cropping Methods: Tillage and Residue Management](#). Ecology is now working on completing draft chapters for in-field sediment basin control, pasture and rangeland management BMPs, and livestock confinement and waste storage BMPs. These additional three chapters plus a chapter on riparian protection will complete the first set of agricultural best management practice guidance that we will incorporate into the next Nonpoint Source Plan update. For more information on the guidance or for future updates, please view the [Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture webpage](#).



CAFO permit reissuance

Due to the June 29, 2021 ruling by the Washington State Court of Appeals on the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) water quality general permit, we have revised our permit reissuance schedule. We are planning public listening sessions for October, to hear feedback on the updates Ecology needs to make to the permit based on the court ruling. Then, in spring 2022, we will have a draft permit available for public comment and hold public workshops and hearings. Our goal is to make a decision on permit reissuance by fall 2022. More information on our reissuance schedule is available at <https://ecology.wa.gov/cafopermit>.

We will plan to have more on this topic at the October meeting.

More information

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