

DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

WATER QUALITY PROGRAM

2015-2020 Strategic Plan

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Dear Water Quality team,

Strategic planning is a journey. For us, it started last summer when our program management team met to discuss recent successes and revisit our mission, vision, values, and goals. Then last fall, Don Seeberger and I, along with help from Eli Levitt, met with each section to get your feedback on a series of discussion questions and draft objectives for the strategic plan.

I consider each of you to be our program's "boots on the ground" in your everyday work. You are the ones who conduct inspections, manage permits, implement nonpoint outreach, develop TMDLs, manage grants, and much more.

For that reason, my goal is that each of you see your work in our strategic plan.

Our meetings last fall were an opportunity to hear from all of you. I sincerely appreciated your feedback. Here are some of the themes we heard:

- Provide more horizontal and vertical career pathways to help develop and retain committed staff.
- Engage with each professional to seek out growth and development opportunities.
- Explore options to improve recruiting and create mentoring, internship, and succession planning opportunities.
- Proactively increase and enhance our program partnerships to address point, nonpoint, and stormwater pollution.
- Improve coordination and communication with other programs that provide financial assistance to better target and prioritize the agency's external investments.
- Maintain our progress on redeveloping PARIS and fully transition our permit program to e-business.
- Track the program's work on TMDL implementation actions and increase coordination between permit, nonpoint, and TMDL staff during TMDL development stages.
- Maintain our momentum in addressing nonpoint issues statewide by continuing our presence in the field and working with committed partners.

Our strategic plan is lean at 20 pages. The plan will be a living document that is direct, adaptable, and current. I want to be able to share the plan with our partners, and with others who ask who we are and what we want to accomplish. I will work with PMT to revisit the plan on a semi-annual basis to help align our work and new projects with this plan as well as our budgeting process.

We received 76 comments from 22 staff members. Of the 76 comments, we incorporated 44 directly into the plan and we responded to the remaining 32. Thank you for taking the time to provide comments and actively take part in this process. We did our best to integrate as much of the comments and feedback as possible.

My vision is that this strategic plan will inform our day-to-day work including the program's business (biennial) plan, performance development plans, budgeting efforts, as well as how we interact with our partners and help grow this agency.

Thanks again for taking the time to review it and provide comment.

Heather R. Bartlett
Water Quality Program Manager

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Preface

“Everything changes and nothing stands still.” – Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus. Public agencies face an uncertain future with varied and complex challenges. In the last decade, we witnessed the crash of the housing market, a major recession, the rise of e-commerce and e-government, the arrival of social media, and an increased focus on government accountability.

Strategic planning is a process to determine what our program wants to achieve in the next five years and a framework for how to do it. We believe strategic planning will help us proactively work to achieve our goals. Effective agencies and programs take time to ask and answer critical questions: *What do we do and for whom? Who are the customers of our services? Where are we today? Where do we want to be in the future and how do we close the gap?*

The Water Quality Program Management Team (PMT) started developing this draft strategic plan in the summer of 2014. Because public agencies are subject to many outside influences beyond our control, PMT needs to revisit objectives and strategies routinely to evaluate the effectiveness and progress relative to our goals. PMT is committed to revisiting this plan twice each year. We believe it is necessary to review the big picture – including our mission, vision, values, and goals every four to five years.

Mission

The mission of the Water Quality Program is to protect and restore Washington’s waters to sustain healthy watersheds and communities. Our work ensures that state waters support beneficial uses including recreational and business activities, supplies for clean drinking water, and the protection of fish, shellfish, wildlife, and public health.

Vision

Working with engaged citizens and partners, we restore and maintain the integrity of Washington’s waters by preventing and eliminating water pollution.

Values

We value our staff and their commitment to public service. We aspire to develop a culture and program that has high levels of:

- Respect
- Innovation
- Excellence
- Teamwork
- Ownership and inclusion

As a program, we commit to and defend these values. We understand that our values define our culture.

We also aspire to build a program with the following characteristics:

- A safe and incident-free workplace
- Satisfaction in the purpose and quality of our work
- Inclusive and collaborative internal and cross-program workspace, as well as
- Healthy and effective communications

Goals

- 1) Prevent and reduce water pollution.
- 2) Clean up polluted waters and engage citizens in the work to protect and restore water quality.
- 3) Develop, recruit and retain highly qualified, competent and committed staff.
- 4) Provide excellent technical & financial assistance.

Four pillars of our strategic plan

- Align around the common purpose of protecting the integrity of Washington's waters.
- Focus on delivering results that maintain and protect water quality.
- Always do better.
- Strive to be enablers and advocates of leadership and respect.

Goal 1: Prevent and reduce water pollution

1A: Prevent and reduce point and stormwater pollution

In 1973, the U.S. EPA delegated the Department of Ecology's Water Quality Program as the state agency responsible for implementing all federal and state water pollution control laws and regulations. The law requires a wastewater discharge permit for disposal of waste material into "waters of the state," which include rivers, lakes, streams, and all underground waters and aquifers.

We regulate discharges of pollutants to surface and ground waters by writing and managing wastewater discharge permits for sewage treatment plants, industrial facilities, and other general categories of wastewater dischargers. We help dischargers comply with existing permits, make permits understandable and effective in protecting water quality, and work to increase the use of reclaimed water.

We also help local governments build stormwater programs in cities and counties. Our stormwater permits cover municipalities, industries, and construction projects. We help dischargers improve compliance with existing stormwater permits and we work to ensure that having a stormwater permit is not a competitive disadvantage.

Strengths

- We have one of the best state managed water quality permit programs in the country.
- As a program, we keep our permits up to date.
- Prevailing decisions in Pollution Control Hearings Board (PCHB) as well as state courts have reinforced our permit program.
- Our external Permit and Reporting Information System (PARIS) website received positive feedback from the 2015 web usability survey led by the Communication and Education team and Anthro-Tech.

Challenges

- Balance the production of high quality permits with low backlog rates.
- High work volume limits ability to prioritize the most environmentally significant permits.
- Facilitate and stay ahead in the e-business transition.

Opportunities

- Maintain our progress on redeveloping PARIS and transitioning our work to e-business
- Focus on priority permits and water quality impact
- Increase effectiveness, timeliness, & transparency of permit program
- Verify municipal permitting
- Decrease risks associated with climate impacts
- Link permit work to TMDLs

Objectives for Goal 1A

1. Move all Water Quality permits to e-business formats. This work includes the transition of PARIS to a Microsoft platform by the end of 2017. Continue to build and improve PARIS as the central backbone of our permit program.
 - 1.1. Ensure that PARIS functions well for both internal and external customers. Examples include data entry, information queries, and permit information review. Assessment of data and timeliness trends should be accessible and straightforward to program staff. In addition, a 'self-service' model should make information retrieval easier for the public and help reduce public disclosures associated with PARIS.
 - 1.2. Increase the number of permits covered in PARIS to align with EPA's new electronic permitting reporting rule.
 - 1.3. Use PARIS to increase coordination between permit staff in HQ and inspection staff in the field (e.g. Construction SW & Industrial SW General Permits). Use PARIS to generate a monthly list of permits issued and

the state's strategy to extend the life of our potable water resources. Water utilities and others may use reclaimed water projects to protect in stream flows, reduce wastewater discharges, provide a drought resistant source of water for non-potable uses, or as a source of water supply that contributes to local efforts to respond to population growth and the impacts of climate change.

6. Increase coordination and alignment between water clean-up plans (TMDLs) and permits.

6.1. Use multiple strategies to improve coordination between TMDL and permit staff:

- Use Permit Writer's Manual as the current guidance.
- Increase coordination between permit writers, TMDL staff and inspectors using cross-discipline teams. Each region should identify teams by June 2016 to coordinate between TMDL leads, inspectors, and permits and develop prioritized list of areas.
- Reopen older TMDLs to improve implementation.
- Managers of permit and TMDL units will organize a series of 3-4 trainings or workshops to increase collaboration between permit managers and TMDL leads in the program by June 2017. Key topics may include:
 - Helping TMDL writers understand roles and limits of permits.
 - Helping permit writers understand TMDL and Straight to Implementation (STI) process.
 - Evaluating options to simplify and improve TMDL administrative processes.
 - How to build bridges between best management practices (BMPs) and waste load allocations (WLAs).

1B: Prevent and reduce nonpoint pollution

Nonpoint pollution is Washington's most serious water quality pollution problem and the most difficult one to solve. It comes from numerous sources, generated by every kind of land use, and has no specific regulatory tool to manage it. Solving the nonpoint pollution problem will require strong partnerships as well as funding and support to communities to prevent and reduce nonpoint source pollution such as animal waste, fertilizer, pesticides, toxic pollutants and erosion issues. We secure federal funding to collaborate with partners to reduce and control nonpoint pollution. For example, we fund projects with farmers who use direct seed techniques to plant and harvest wheat in a manner that significantly reduces erosion and the use agricultural chemicals.

Strengths

- Washington has regulatory programs to address nonpoint pollution from forest practice activities, dairy manure management and onsite septic systems.
- Initiatives exist in Washington that help support progress including straight to implementation projects, the Farm Smart Certification program, the Governor's Shellfish initiative, the Spokane River Toxics Task Force, and the Puget Sound Action Agenda.
- Permittees recognize their investments in preventing pollution are more meaningful through coordinated nonpoint pollution measures with others.
- Nonpoint staff are highly experienced and we have an established nonpoint grant program. We rely on these strengths in our TMDL program and straight to implementation work to address nonpoint pollution.

Challenges

- Nonpoint water pollution from agricultural and other sources is often controversial and highly politicized.
- Federal funding to address nonpoint pollution will likely become more restricted (e.g. 319) and another will sunset before 2020 (e.g. EPA's National Estuary Partnership grants). These two federal grants are funding important projects and expanding the program's nonpoint efforts throughout Western Washington.
- Many citizens still believe the majority of water pollution comes from point sources and that nonpoint implementation should be voluntary. It is difficult to shift the paradigm from point sources to nonpoint.

Opportunities

- Nonpoint work in agriculture areas
- Prevent and reduce nonpoint pollution to surface and ground waters by identifying, approving, and tracking best management practices (BMPs) in every water cleanup plan
- Develop suites of BMPs by sector or land use
- Prioritize and integrate nonpoint pollution reduction tools and improve staff coordination
- Promote certainty programs that protect clean water
- Groundwater pollution control and cleanup

Objectives for Goal 1B

1. We continually strive to improve how we work. The director convened an *Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Group* to give us input about ways to improve our watershed evaluation process in agricultural areas. The group made several recommendations, which Ecology is implementing.

Increase education and outreach efforts in agricultural watersheds where we work, communicate with willing conservation districts, and engage with producer groups. Improve communications with producer groups about nonpoint pollution problems and solutions.

2. Implement TMDLs and STIs that specify clean water BMPs by land use type to achieve compliance with RCW 90.48. We will work with and solicit feedback from stakeholders as well as other agencies and Ecology programs (such as the Hazardous Waste and Toxics Reduction Program) on BMPs.
 - 2.1. We will need to develop suites of BMPs to include in TMDLs and STIs that address prominent land use types within a targeted watershed. Land use types may include hobby farms, residential urban, residential suburban, park systems, irrigated agricultural land, grain production, etc.
 - We need to describe and document BMPs for TMDLs and other water pollution cleanup plans with enough detail to enable tracking and assessment (e.g. miles of fencing installed, acres restored with plantings, coordinates of BMPs, width of buffers, etc.).
 - Establish implementation monitoring before we conduct effectiveness monitoring.
 - Continue to support the Forest Practices Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). The Forests and Fish rule implemented in 2000 for all state and private forestlands in the state. This will determine whether the BMPs meet targets and are effective on privately owned forested lands.
 - PMT will seek funding to maintain the nonpoint inspection and enforcement program to ensure we implement clean water BMPs in key areas. Currently, many of the program's nonpoint inspection positions are project and tied to the National Estuary Partnership work in the Puget Sound. We will seek out options to maintain these positions in the long term. Nonpoint compliance requires building relationships with communities in specific watersheds. Investing in these positions in the long term is imperative to nonpoint pollution work.
3. Increase coordination and communication between nonpoint inspectors, TMDL staff, as well as financial and grant project managers to ensure that nonpoint outreach is consistent. Better use of tools including:
 - Conduct targeted education and outreach
 - Maintain existing partnerships and develop new ones
 - Write and implement water cleanup plans
 - Implement Straight To Implementation strategies (STIs)
 - Provide financial and technical assistance
 - Respond to complaints, providing compliance assistance and enforcement when necessary

Focus nonpoint resources in areas where we are planning and implementing cleanup plans (TMDLs and STIs). Prioritize and coordinate work in the regions to ensure nonpoint reduction efforts and financial assistance has a durable impact in targeted watersheds. We will also evaluate other tools to help us address nonpoint pollution including:

- Water quality trading
 - Certification/certainty programs
4. Increase the use of certainty programs to protect water quality, incentivize the installation and maintenance of clean water BMPs, and provide more regulatory certainty to producers (e.g. Farm Smart).
 - 4.1. Collaborate with PNW Direct Seed Association to launch the Farm Smart certification. Work with PNWDSA and willing conservation districts to meet a stretch target of certified farms enrolled in the next three to five years.
 - 4.2. Discuss collaboration with other potential partners.

5. Increase groundwater cleanup activities by mapping and prioritizing nitrate impact areas statewide, use groundwater monitoring in key areas to identify specific nonpoint problems, and help focus implementation efforts on BMPs that achieve compliance with RCW 90.48.
 - 5.1. Continue working with the lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) workgroup to ensure that we target the right areas for sampling and implementation actions.
 - 5.2. Incorporate consideration of aquifer storage and recovery potential during TMDL studies.
 - 5.3. Continue to use Ground Water Management Areas and TMDL implementation plans to address areas of the state that demonstrate groundwater pollution issues. We need mapping, monitoring data, and TDML studies to identify those river systems (and reaches) where subsurface conditions are conducive to rapid exchange of groundwater and surface waters.

Goal 2: Clean-up water pollution and engage partners and citizens in the work to protect and restore water quality

2A: Clean-up Water Pollution

Ecology helps local communities and businesses clean-up polluted waters to meet water quality standards. We assess state waters, update the list of polluted waterbodies, and develop watershed cleanup plans (TMDLs).

The Federal Clean Water Act established the watershed cleanup (TMDL) process. Through this law, states must identify sources of pollution in waters and prepare a plan to address those pollutants. TMDLs establish limits on pollutant discharges to a given waterbody that still allow the water body to meet state water quality standards. In addition to TMDLs, we adopted a Straight to Implementation (STI) process that employs a watershed-based strategy to identify and address nonpoint pollution sources.

We carry out state and federally mandated rulemaking, policy development, enforcement actions, and other work that demands substantial public involvement. We are committed to being transparent, open, and accountable to the public, policy leaders, news media, and the communities we serve. The public relies on rapidly changing and emerging communication technologies to gather, understand, and share information. As a program, we need to constantly assess and improve our delivery of information to customers and stakeholders.

Strengths

- During a 12-year period we completed, in partnership with the Environmental Assessment Program (EAP), cleanup plans that addressed 961 water quality listings (2002-2014).
- Technical quality of TMDL studies and plans are high and include specific implementation actions.

Challenges

- The Performance Partnership Agreement sets a new target of completing cleanup plans (TMDLs) that address 53 water quality listings per year.
- We need to enhance implementation of TMDL requirements by increasing coordination with stormwater permitting and nonpoint staff.
- EAP's ability to do water quality/TMDL studies under predictable and consistent timelines impacts production levels.
- Success in reducing nonpoint pollution requires increased collaboration with municipal and state entities involved in urban growth management and planning.
- We do not have tools to review TMDL implementation progress.
- There is insufficient data to assess whether TMDLs are effective. Since 2002, EAP evaluated 127 TMDLs via effectiveness monitoring (EM). Of the 127 TMDLs evaluated, 49 were determined to be meeting water quality standards and targets. Only three of the studies had sufficient data to detect trends with confidence.

Opportunities

- Increase TMDL production
- Set regional TMDL production targets
- Increase Straight to Implementation actions
- Decrease time and resources needed for TMDL production
- Increase TMDL implementation actions and tracking
- Launch effectiveness monitoring initiative
- Improve internal WQ assessment process and maintain progress on WQ standards

Objectives for Goal 2A

1. Increase TMDL production to meet new program target of addressing 53 listings per year and 106 listings per biennium as part of our work under the EPA-Ecology Performance Partnership Agreement (PPA). Work with stakeholders so they know where we will start new TMDLs.
 - 1.1. Each region will set a TMDL target and develop a production plan and supporting budget for their share of the TMDLs. Managers need to collaborate with EAP to set regional and program wide production targets.
 - 1.2. Each region will identify listings that we can successfully address via STIs. STIs should comprise at least 10-15% of the total TMDL target.
 - 1.3. Regions and HQ staff will use existing data and implementation actions to reduce the need for detailed analysis.
 - 1.4. Increase coordination with the Hazardous Waste & Toxics Reduction (HWTR) Program to identify key chemical pollutants and find alternatives in our TMDLS.
 - 1.5. Increase the number of TMDLs that assess the impact of climate change on stream temperature and flow based on our experience modeling the South Fork of the Nooksack River with EPA, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, and others. Complete five temperature TMDLs using climate projections by June 2020.
2. Increase cleanup implementation actions and track our progress in order to increase number of water bodies that meet standards.
 - 2.1. Each region will develop implementation plans to target BMPs and activities identified in approved TMDLs by December 2017. Increase outreach efforts to municipalities and the public, and integrate TMDL implementation actions into comprehensive plans.
 - 2.2. Develop a TMDL tracking and implementation database by December 2017. The development of a robust implementation and effectiveness monitoring database is a critical component of the TMDL process and is necessary to track and map water quality improvement projects, improve coordination with local groups, and expedite the recovery of impaired waters throughout the state. A new system should have the following attributes:
 - Track and display information on a relational geospatial platform.
 - Track implementation of clean water BMPs statewide including mobile field applications and mapping capabilities.
 - Ability to document onsite inspections or site visits to verify BMP implementation.
 - Link between TMDL/STI implementation plans and effectiveness monitoring studies.
 - Identify groups to implement nonpoint pollution prevention and control activities.
 - Serve as an outreach and communications tool for the public and legislative staff.
 - Integrate database management systems:
 - Permit and Reporting Information System (PARIS)
 - Watershed Assessment Tracking (WATS)
 - Environmental Information Management (EIM)
 - Grants Reporting and Tracking System (GRTS)
 - Grant & Loan (EAGL)
 - BMP or restoration databases outside Ecology managed by other agencies
3. Develop and implement a new effectiveness monitoring initiative that reflects available resources. Ensure that planning, financial assistance, and implementation work proceeds effectiveness monitoring in targeted

watersheds. Work with EAP to develop and launch the effectiveness monitoring initiative by November 2016. Assess implementation and monitoring at the watershed level in key watersheds.

3.1. Each region will select one TMDL, geographic area, or pollution control plan and develop an effectiveness monitoring plan with EAP that spans the life of the specific TMDL or plan. EAP and WQ leads in each region will need to collaborate closely and consider the following steps:

- Develop effectiveness monitoring plans at the time of the TMDL technical study and during the drafting of the implementation plan.
- Determine overall effectiveness using BMPs within treatment areas.
- Draft an adaptive management plan that uses data review and reporting to WQ lead, inspectors, and stakeholders.
- Collaborate with EAP to track implementation.
- Use web based reporting of results over time.

3.2. Seek out funding to support new effectiveness monitoring initiative in partnership with EAP.

4. Improve efficiency of the WQ assessment process so that reports are timely and up-to date with latest data. Finish phase 1 by December 2015 and complete the automation of the WQ Assessment data process no later than January 2020. The goal is to update the WQ assessment at increased frequency to capture more real time actions with outcomes.

4.1. Draft a plan and schedule with EAP to ensure a new process is developed and tested for the next WQ Assessment.

4.2. Ensure the program completes key actions in advance of next Triennial Review process:

- Coordinate with the Governor's Office on next steps for the Water Quality Standards.
- Work on use changes or site-specific criteria to waterbodies where data and information indicate standards are incorrect.
- Update criteria: develop and adopt human health criteria (along with an integrated strategy) for mercury, for aquatic life, bacteria, and dissolved oxygen to protect spawning gravels.
- Develop guidance for high profile issues: pollutant trading, UAAs, better indicators for ocean acidification, nutrient controls.

2B: Engage partners and citizens in the work to protect and restore water quality

Strengths

- Regions are creative in finding ways to address problems, draft TMDLs, and collaborate with partners to implement cleanup actions.
- We have multiple methods to reach the broad public including websites and social media.

Challenges

- We reduced outreach during the recession. It will take time to rebuild outreach capacity
- Find ways to engage and increase awareness to the broader public.

Opportunities

- Improve Water Quality Program web presence
- Develop more short videos that tell water quality success stories
- Improve outreach and environmental education efforts
- Increase use of visual tools for the public
- Increase engagement with stakeholders and the public
- Improve program partnerships

Objectives for Goal 2B

1. In partnership with the agency's Communications team and PMT, develop a program plan to improve content and navigation of our websites, to include the permit pages. Complete milestones in the plan while taking care of all other emerging website needs. Base changes on the latest customer service survey and the web usability study.
 - 1.1. Identify our highest priority websites.
 - 1.2. Develop a prolonged implementation plan to update and reduce total number of web pages.
 - 1.3. Improve readability and 'scannability.'
 - 1.4. Fix inconsistencies.
 - 1.5. Decrease words per page and average number of clicks to get to target.
 - 1.6. Provide clear information on permit requirements and permit processes.
 - 1.7. Increase the use of videos and "how to"/ tutorial topics.
 - 1.8. Consolidate and remove old content as applicable.
 - 1.9. Move materials to SharePoint for internal uses if staff are the only users.
2. Tell stories online so they are easily consumable and target key audiences.
 - 2.1. Post our videos prominently on our website.
 - 2.2. Promote our videos using social media.
 - 2.3. Put written stories in Ecology blog and move away from publishing them as pdfs.
 - 2.4. Use stories to call out role models, successful partnerships, examples, or roadmaps to inspire others.
 - 2.5. Lead and inspire entire program to participate in developing videos and video ideas.
3. Rebuild program's institutional outreach and education skill sets.
 - 3.1. Re-engage the [Washington Waters – Ours to Protect](#) education program.
 - 3.2. Lead and train staff to develop social marketing outreach plans and support these efforts with resources to carry out the marketing strategy.

- 3.3. Lead and train staff to be public hearings officers. Public hearings officers provide key facilitation and outreach services for the program during important events. Train 7-10 staff in the next two years.
 - 3.4. Lead and train staff to run online webinars and videoconferences.
 - 3.5. Lead and train staff in how to develop videos and web tutorials.
 - 3.6. Assist in the management of high-profile issues, in headquarters and regions that need effective outreach.
- 4. Increase the use of visual tools – especially maps, infographics and videos – to communicate our work to the public and stakeholders.
 - 4.1. Maps (BMPs, grant and loan projects)
 - 4.2. Videos
 - 4.3. Story maps (<http://storymaps.arcgis.com/en/articles/what-is-a-story-map/>)
 - 4.4. Infographics
 - 4.5. Photos
- 5. Improve dialogue and collaboration with our partners and stakeholders to create the change needed to improve water quality conditions on a large scale.
 - 5.1. Use online meetings with the Water Quality Partnership, Financial Assistance Council and Wastewater Discharge Fee Advisory Committee.
 - 5.2. Continue to improve our communications based on the outcome of the permit customer survey.
 - 5.3. Engage with citizens who support our mission and goals by ensuring partners understand how they can support us and counteract some of the resistance we often face.
- 6. Proactively increase and enhance partnerships to address point and nonpoint water pollution.
 - 6.1. Each region should schedule two meetings per year with local health districts and conservation districts for collaboration, information sharing, and assessing progress toward common goals of protecting public health through environmental protection.
 - 6.2. Explore and develop new partnerships with land trusts, fishing groups, regional watershed groups, salmon and shellfish protection efforts, and groups working on certainty programs to enhance the program’s presence in key watersheds and achieve buy-in for water cleanup planning and implementation.
 - 6.3. Enhance existing partnerships including the Water Quality Partnership, the Water Quality Financial Assistance Council, Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association (PNDSA), the Puget Sound Partnership, Spokane River Toxics Reduction Task Force, the Lower Duwamish River, and other Ecology programs.
 - Reducing toxic threats is an important priority for the program, especially working with our partners in the Spokane and Lower Duwamish Rivers. These two initiatives serve as a bridge to build strong partnerships internally and externally with community members – focusing on problem solving during complex projects.
 - PMT and staff will work diligently to effectively engage other Ecology programs to accomplish key parts of our work including education and outreach efforts to reduce toxic threats. Improved education on toxics, for example, it would be more effective if we collaborate with HWTR and the Toxics Cleanup Program (TCP) to develop agency-wide education and outreach campaigns.
 - Continue to invest in our pretreatment permit program as an important partnership. Ecology assists in developing and administering local pretreatment programs to control the discharge of water pollutants to our larger publicly owned treatment works (POTWs), and works with smaller POTWs to issue permits for their tributary industries that protect the POTWs processes.

Goal 3: Provide excellent technical and financial assistance

Ecology's WQP provides financial and technical assistance to public entities, including local governments, municipalities, conservation districts, tribes, and non-profit organizations to protect and improve water quality. We provide assistance to address both point source and nonpoint source pollution and dedicate significant staff resources to support technical assistance to permittees, local groups involved in TMDLs, as well as grant and loan projects.

We provide financial assistance, in the form of grants and low-interest loans for planning, design, and construction of water pollution control facilities and for nonpoint source pollution control projects and activities such as agricultural best management practices, watershed planning, TMDL implementation, stormwater management, on-site sewage system management including repair and replacement, freshwater aquatic plant management, and education and outreach. We provide grant funding to nonpoint projects and financially challenged communities seeking to construct needed wastewater facilities. Low interest loan funding supports both point and nonpoint source water pollution prevention and correction projects.

Strengths

- Our combined financial assistance program is a model of efficiency. We provided approximately \$467 million in financial support in 2013-2015 to partners committed to protecting water quality throughout the state.
- Our financial assistance program helps communities meet water quality standards, incentivizes TMDL implementation, supports permit compliance, and provides direct support for voluntary water quality improvement and protection.
- The 2014 customer service survey affirmed our program's strength in providing technical assistance and customer service. We maintained positive scores associated with permitting and inspections.

Challenges

- The stability of some water quality funding sources and levels based on state and federal budget processes creates uncertainty on funding availability each biennium. New funding conditions also create complexity and change requirements from one year to the next.
- Cuts to partner funding sources, like the Public Works Assistance Account, put pressure on program funding, particularly the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), to meet statewide water quality infrastructure needs.
- Defining and capturing performance metrics on the broad range of project types is challenging and time intensive.
- Small financially challenged communities struggle to meet their clean water infrastructure needs and lack staff to support planning, engineering and the design work associated with new projects.

Opportunities

- Maintain transparency and accountability of our financial assistance program
- Improve data sharing and outcomes reporting
- Coordinate agency investments
- Improve staff coordination and training
- Prioritize and target financial assistance
- Publish biennial water quality financial assistance report
- Improve technical assistance and customer service

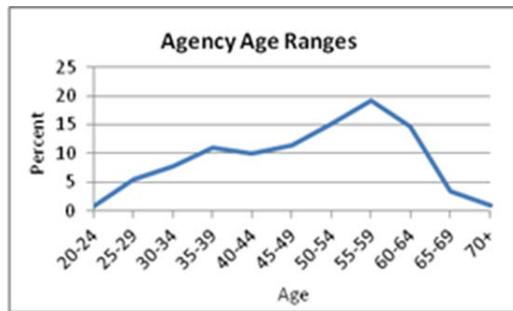
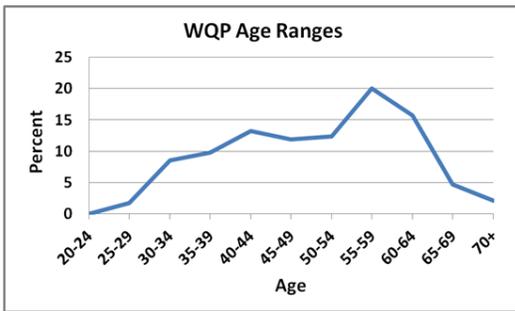
Objectives for Goal 3

1. Maintain high levels of transparency, accountability and fiscal integrity in our financial assistance program. We will provide detailed information for the public, other government agencies, and members of the legislature on grant and loan projects funded each year.
 - 1.1. Maintain high levels of program and project transparency, accountability and fiscal integrity. We want to provide detailed information for the public, other government agencies, and members of the legislature on grant and loan projects funded and completed (closed) each year.
 - 1.2. Involve internal and external stakeholders in funding program development, including rules, guidance, policies, and application process. Continue collaboration with the Water Quality Financial Assistance Council, the Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council, and other funding agencies.
 - 1.3. Provide opportunity for public comment on funding offers, rules, and major funding program changes.
 - 1.4. Maintain excellent financial project management to ensure good outcomes on all financial audits. Coordinate with fiscal office for consistency in project administration and fiscal policy and procedure.
 - 1.5. Increase public awareness of the performance data, including project details, deliverables and environmental outcomes of each funded grant and loan through online tools and outreach materials.
 - 1.6. Share annual audit report findings and program evaluations with the WQ Financial Assistance Council and other stakeholders.
2. Improve financial assistance information and data sharing capabilities. Focus on providing access to detailed project information and increase public awareness of the water quality projects funded, including implementation of BMPs, project deliverables, and environmental outcomes.
 - 2.1. Establish and track project performance metrics to better track grant and loan outcomes. Evaluate how to capture more environmental data through EIM to demonstrate the environmental benefits.
 - 2.2. Release grant and loan performance data and BMP tracking data for the public on an annual basis by January 2017 – starting with one year’s worth of data. Continue to develop performance metrics that are consistent and incorporate data reporting requirements into agreements. Ensure data is consistent and aligned with federal environmental reporting data requirements for CWSRF, Section 319, and National Estuary Program (NEP) grants.
 - 2.3. Financial Management Section and Program Manager’s Office managers should develop the requirements and solicit funds to build a program database to capture the performance (outcome/output/BMP) data. Develop new or improve existing tools for gathering project data and mapping BMPs using the WQ Atlas or other mapping tools. Ensure location and BMP data is usable in multiple systems. Ensure coordination with staff working on tracking TMDL implementation actions (Objective 2 of Goal 2A).
 - 2.4. Identify staffing resources to improve timely project closeouts and to document project outcomes.
3. Increase information sharing and collaboration across Ecology programs and with other agencies to encourage coordinated investments. Collaborate with other programs and agencies to help us prioritize and select projects. Increase cooperation with other programs to provide more holistic technical assistance with financial resources.
 - 3.1. Provide quality assurance to funding projects by working with other programs. The goal of working in coordination with other programs is to discuss and improve one or more of the following:
 - Identify quality projects to fund from the agency level.
 - Write better financial assistance agreements.
 - Help our applicants develop and submit better project proposals.
 - Work with funding recipients to ensure the success of their project.

- Coordinate with staff in other programs to have more field presence and monitor recipient progress.
- 3.2.** Improve customer service to recipients by having WQ financial and project managers collaborate with Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program, the Environmental Assessment Program, and the Water Resources Program to give recipients the tools and resources to meet their goals.
 - 3.3.** Increase consistency of communication to grant and loan recipients.
 - 3.4.** Share and discuss WQP funding list with other programs.
 - 3.5.** Support small financially challenged communities using targeted technical assistance and through Small Communities Initiative and Rural Community Assistance Corporation.
- 4.** Increase coordination and communication between project leads in the region, technical staff, and financial managers to improve technical assistance on projects.
 - 4.1.** Develop communication tools including focus sheets, training, etc.
 - 4.2.** Involve regional staff in eligibility discussions to increase staff involvement.
 - 4.3.** Increase documentation of key decisions and related records on SharePoint or another tool. Ensure regions receive notification of key decisions, changes to criteria, or policy.
 - 4.4.** Continue Project Management Summits on a biannual basis to increase communication and coordination.
 - 4.5.** Increase our internal capacity to provide technical and financial assistance to communities undertaking climate adaptation projects by sending staff to trainings, webinars, and conferences.
 - 5.** Improve communication of regional, program, and agency priorities (e.g. reducing toxic threats).
 - 5.1.** Help direct or target funding to high priority projects. PMT should identify agency, program, and regional water quality priorities for consideration during grant application periods each year
 - 5.2.** On an annual basis, regions should produce a list of actions needed in high priority watersheds. Project proposals focused on implementing BMPs in these priority areas should receive extra consideration during the scoring process – assuming they meet standard eligibility criteria.
 - 6.** Increase communication of funding successes by publishing a financial assistance report every other year – the first report is due June 2017.
 - 6.1.** Create a summary by project category of the number of projects by location (region, county, legislative district), education and outreach efforts, dollars invested by geographic area.
 - 6.2.** Provide information and examples on coordinated investments and successful projects.
 - 6.3.** Share Results Washington reports on stormwater treatment and infiltration projects as well as other outcome assessments with program stakeholders.
 - 7.** Improve scores for permit and inspection work by 5 percent or more in key categories in the agency’s customer service survey by 2020. Our goal is to deliver efficient and effective services. Categories showing room for improvement include – decision was timely (permits), viewed customer/applicant as a partner equally committed to a healthy environment (permits and inspections), was it easy to find the information you needed on website (permits and inspections), and was the website used to find information about applying for a permit (permits).
 - 7.1.** Develop short (one to two years) and midterm (5 years) plan to improve customer service scores for permit and inspection work program wide. The program and each region will develop an improvement plan and sets goals based on results of 2012 and 2014 surveys.

Goal 4: Develop, recruit, and retain highly qualified and committed staff

Our staff are the program's greatest resource. Increasing pressures from a prolonged recession, state budget reductions, and competitive salaries are challenging our ability to recruit and retain highly qualified and competent staff. In addition, many of our most experienced staff members are poised to retire within the next 5-10 years. We estimate that 55% of our staff are 50 or older, 25% are in their 40s, and only 20% are 39 or younger.



Strengths

- Staff appreciate flexible work schedules and good work/life balance.
- We have jobs that matter as we work with communities and customers to find solutions to water pollution.
- Ecology HR is a ready and willing partner.
- Recruitments have resulted in staff with talent and dedication to the program mission.
- Our program has a committed workforce with extensive knowledge.

Challenges

- In the near term, our program expects more retirements than any other program in Ecology.
- Our current vacancy rate is two times higher than our target.
- We have not established or maintained any formal programs to train new staff and transfer knowledge as staff members retire. We do not have formal mentoring, internship, or succession planning programs.
- Staff morale is low coming out of the prolonged recession. Some staff expressed that there are few, if any, options for horizontal and vertical career movement within the program.

Opportunities

- Recruit
- Develop and train
- Retain
- Evolve

Objectives for Goal 4

The program will improve the process for hiring, outline career path options, and improve supervisory and management skills to grow our staff.

1. Increase our involvement in agency recruiting efforts and our presence at job recruitment events.

- 1.1. Each section will be encouraged to identify one or more positions to re-class to entry level or “in training” to provide succession planning and career development opportunities.
 - 1.2. Section managers will review vacancies to ensure each position meets current and near term business needs. The program manager will ask all managers and supervisors to update position descriptions and PDPs each year to reflect current work activities and address changing business needs.
 - 1.3. Establish at least one long standing WQ internship program.
 - 1.4. Program Management Team and unit supervisors established the *Position Description Workgroup* to improve consistency in specific job classes including environmental engineers, hydrogeologists, environmental specialists, and environmental planners. The workgroup will complete review of three to four job classes (EE, HG, ES, and EP) by July 2016. The Program Planner will develop the group’s work plan and update the Program Management team on a regular basis.
 - 1.5. Identify staff volunteers to participate in job fairs on college campuses and elsewhere. Each section should identify one or two staff to attend two to four recruiting events annually.
 - 1.6. Coordinate with HR on how to engage at the high school, undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels to recruit individuals aligned with our mission. Actively work with staff to identify and recruit potential applicants for key positions.
2. Improve knowledge transfer for staff by designing and implementing new mentoring, internship, and succession planning programs. Increase development and training efforts program wide.
 - 2.1. Improve Performance and Development Plan (PDP) process to make it more meaningful to staff and their career. Beginning in the 2015-2017 biennium, encourage supervisors to work with their direct reports to create career development plans. These plans are longer than one year and may include elements for integration into the PDP each year. Target – develop the people, not just the profession.
 - 2.2. Identify high priority trainings for all staff in each section, track attendance, and assess value at the section level.
 - 2.3. Ensure training plans include mix of professional development and agency core courses.
 - 2.4. Work with HR to develop core supervisor and management training series. Ensure program maintains 100% attendance of supervisors in Crucial Conversations and other management foundational trainings 2015-2020.
 - 2.5. Maintain and improve IT skills throughout the program. As our business evolves, our use of advanced technical tools will increase. Employees should set annual goals to improve their comfort with technology. Key areas include use of everyday software such as Word, Excel, ArcGIS, as well as use of emerging web-based technologies like SharePoint, Dropbox, Doodle, and others.
 - 2.6. Program Planner will assess how Ecology and other agencies are addressing high turnover and retirement rates. The Planner and PMT will review proposals for establishing formal succession planning, internships, and mentoring by December 2015. Implement new programs in priority order starting in 2016.
 - 2.7. Develop a program wide mentoring and training program for new staff. Training and mentoring areas could include engineering, permitting, TMDL, financial management, and nonpoint. Managers and staff need to commit to consistent implementation agency wide to make program durable. PMT and program manager will develop and implement our own succession planning strategies by December 2015. We plan to help managers identify, recruit, and fill approximately 10 key positions in the next year by August 2016. PMT will use this experience to continue to encourage other programs and agency leadership to build a broader succession planning initiative.

- 3.** Increase efforts to retain committed staff by creating a culture of respect, excellence, innovation (continuous improvement), teamwork, ownership and inclusion.
 - 3.1.** Ensure supervisors establish and maintain regular one-on-one meetings with direct reports to provide timely and effective feedback and support.
 - 3.2.** Institutionalize regular and consistent positive feedback and recognition for jobs well done.
 - 3.3.** Promote a culture of continual process improvement by identifying and conducting LEAN events at the section or work group level. In this culture, staff know that managers consider new ideas and take suggestions for improvement seriously and staff within the organization see change as positive. Developing and maintaining a LEAN culture requires a long-term commitment and humility from managers in the program.
 - 3.4.** Encourage supervisors to use regular meetings to discuss work plans and accomplishments.
 - 3.5.** Review the Employer of Choice survey information annually and use feedback to identify opportunities for improvement. Create and implement a plan to improve program scores within two months of receiving annual results.
 - 3.6.** The program will work with HR to identify ways to track how our positions have changed over time (e.g. we used to have more ES2s and ES3s) and how many qualified applications we get by job class. We cannot address recruitment and retention issues without better data to understand the current situation.
- 4.** Help the workforce evolve, as our business needs change over time.
 - 4.1.** Routinely evaluate and adjust how PMT deploys staff to ensure our workforce is working on current and anticipated needs. Ensure permit related work aligns with workload and priorities.
 - Each section should identify and prioritize new and emerging business needs each year and present the list to PMT and the program manager via the strategic investment process. Section managers should identify training needs and opportunities for staff skill development.
 - Managers should review and evaluate data on workforce and program activities and evaluate the results when preparing to meet new or emergent business needs.
 - PMT will revisit and update the strategic plan including Goal 4 strategies and actions on a semi-annual or annual basis.