

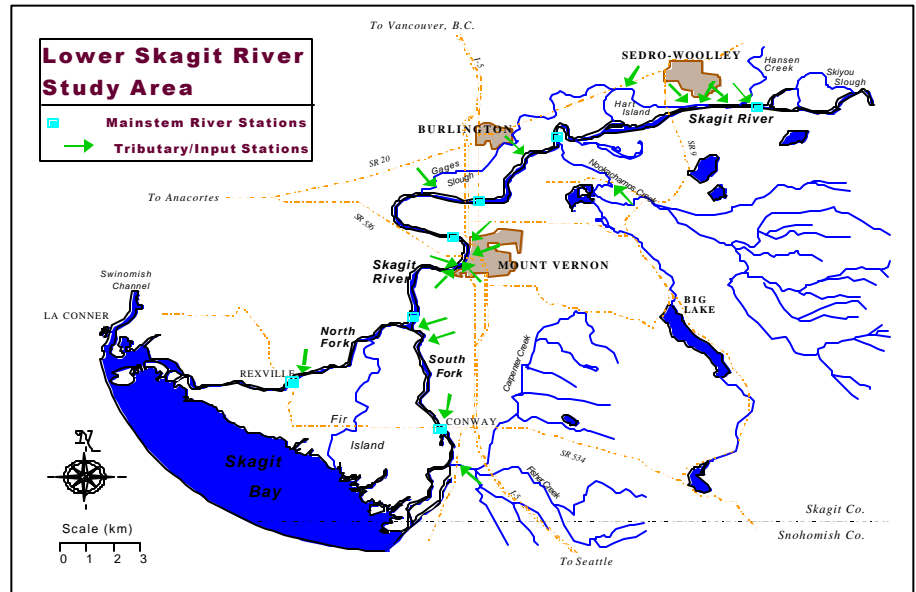


# Focus

## WATER QUALITY IN WASHINGTON STATE

### Lower Skagit River Bacteria Water Cleanup Plans

The federal Clean Water Act requires states to conduct statewide water quality assessments to identify and list surface waters that do not meet water quality standards. For listed waters, states must establish maximum limits on the amounts of pollutants that can be discharged to a water body and still allow that water



body to meet water quality standards. These limits are called Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL). The Department of Ecology (Ecology) is preparing a water cleanup plan on the Lower Skagit River to address TMDL bacteria issues. The goal of a water cleanup plan is to protect water quality by allocating the pollutant loading among all sources in a fair and cost effective manner. If the plan identifies all the potential pollution sources and is fully implemented, then the potential of unfairly burdening one particular individual, business, or city will be minimized. To develop this plan, Ecology is asking for local comments on the document.

#### Public Involvement in Lower Skagit River TMDL Process

Ecology encourages affected local governments, agencies, dischargers, and other interested parties to comment on the Lower Skagit Bacteria Water Clean-up plan. We need the cooperation of local citizens, businesses and other entities to develop solutions to water quality problems. Ecology invites written comments and suggestions about this document and the TMDL process for the Lower Skagit. You can request a copy of the TMDL Clean-up plan by contacting David Pater by phone (425) 649-7093 or e-mail [dapa461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:dapa461@ecy.wa.gov) or by downloading a version of the report at: <http://www.wa.gov/ecology/biblio/0010010.html>

Ecology will hold a public meeting at the Skagit PUD Aqua room 1415 Freeway Drive Mount Vernon, WA on March 20, 2000 at 6:30 p.m. to discuss the Lower Skagit River TMDL process. The purpose of this public meeting is to review the information and take public comment on the water cleanup plan proposal. Address written comments to: David Pater, Department of Ecology, Water Quality Program, Northwest Regional Office, 3190 - 160th Avenue SE, Bellevue, WA 98008-5452. **Comments will be accepted until April 7, 2000.**

## **Background**

This water cleanup plan focuses on fecal coliform bacteria pollution in the Lower Skagit River downstream from Skiyou Slough near Sedro Woolley to Skagit Bay including both the North and South Fork of the River. Ecology has already completed an analysis of the impact on Skagit River bacteria and dissolved oxygen levels from pollutants discharged by sewage treatment plants in Mount Vernon, Burlington, Sedro Woolley, and Big Lake. Ecology is now focusing on other sources of fecal coliform in the basin. The majority of the remaining sources of fecal coliform bacteria in the Lower Skagit River basin are most likely farms that have livestock, cities with urban stormwater runoff and homes or businesses with failing septic systems. All of the above pollution sources affect beneficial uses of the river and marine waters in Skagit Bay. We are asking these sources to participate in efforts to stop pollution from entering the river system. Beneficial uses include water supply, shellfish and fish, agricultural and industrial uses, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

## **Lower Skagit River TMDL Study**

In 1994, the Department of Ecology selected the lower Skagit River for a TMDL study because previous water quality sampling suggested that the river was exceeding state standards for fecal coliform bacteria. Fecal coliform may indicate the presence of bacteria that are harmful to people. In Skagit Bay, 13,400 acres of shellfish harvesting areas have been closed or restricted to commercial harvesting due to high bacteria levels. In addition, Chinook Salmon and Bull Trout populations in the Skagit River have declined in recent years due in part to water quality degradation. Both species of fish are listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Fecal coliform is often associated with other pollutants that are harmful to fish. Human population growth may intensify these problems.

The main goal of the lower Skagit River TMDL study was to identify water quality problems and sources in the river and Skagit Bay. The TMDL study concluded that fecal coliform bacteria levels exceed standards in many tributaries of the lower Skagit River, and in the marine waters at the mouths of the North and South Forks. The suggested priority correction actions are:

- **Reduce combined sewage overflows from Mount Vernon to once per year or less.**
- **Implement the Nookachamps Creek Watershed Action Plan to bring the creek back into compliance with bacteria standards.**
- **Locate and eliminate an unidentified bacteria source on the Skagit River between Kulshan Creek in Mount Vernon and the I-5 Bridge over the Skagit.**
- **Provide controls to bring Carpenter and Fisher Creeks into compliance with bacteria standards.**
- **Reduce fecal coliform levels in the discharge from the Rexville pump station (Drainage Dist. 15).**

The "Lower Skagit TMDL Data Summary" (November 1996) contains the data and collection methods for the TMDL study. The "Lower Skagit River TMDL Water Quality Study" (July 1997) contains the technical assessments on which the TMDL recommendations are based. Both of these documents are available from the Department of Ecology Northwest Regional Office and from the Ecology website:

<http://www.wa.gov/ecology/eils/skagtml/pubs.html>

Ecology will apply the TMDL findings to modify point source discharge permits for wastewater treatment plants. Reducing pollution from nonpoint sources requires a cooperative effort amongst state and local governments and citizens. Skagit County, Ecology, and local interests have collaborated on nonpoint pollution control plans for several areas in the County, including the Nookachamps basin. Local residents are implementing the recommendations in the Nookachamps basin plan as funding allows. We need comparable efforts in other tributary basins to allow all users of the Skagit River and Skagit Bay to enjoy the benefits of clean water.

If you need this document in an alternative format call David Pater at (425) 649-7093 or (425) 649-4259 (TDD).