



# Focus

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## Gibbons Creek water cleanup planning update

### Issue

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Gibbons Creek, which is located in Clark County near Washougal, is facing water quality challenges. A study by the state Department of Ecology (Ecology) has found that water in the creek violates water quality standards for fecal coliform bacteria.

Fecal coliform is a major concern because it indicates that biological waste is entering the river. Common sources of fecal coliform include failing septic tanks and agricultural run-off.

### Federal law requires cleanup of polluted waters

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Federal law requires states to identify sources of pollution in waters that fall short of water quality standards, and to determine how much of each kind of pollution the waters can receive and still remain healthy. A set of pollutant allocations for that water body, based on sampling data, is called a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), or water cleanup plan.

Ecology is in the process of developing a water cleanup plan for Gibbons Creek because it was listed, along with about 600 other polluted waters across Washington, for cleanup planning. After broad participation by local authorities and citizens, Ecology will submit the Gibbons Creek water cleanup plan to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

### Pollution problems may have many roots

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There is no single source of pollution to Gibbons Creek. There are no industrial outfalls, or pipes, that discharge into the creek. Therefore, Ecology experts believe that “non-point” pollution is to blame for the basin’s water quality dilemma.

“Non-point” pollution is caused by people and their activities. It is pollution that is not necessarily discharged through a pipe or an outfall (called “point-source” pollution). Non-point pollution is sometimes invisible. It can result from failing septic tanks, agricultural waste that gets into rivers; sediments that run off construction sites; stormwater that races to the creek from rooftops, driveways, roads, and fertilizer-laden lawns. It comes from people washing their cars in their driveways and from people dumping their paint buckets in ditches or in storm drains.

Non-point pollution is worsened because of the increase in houses and pavement, and the loss of stream-side trees and wetlands. Water that would normally go back into the ground or filter through vegetation, instead carries extensive pollution to the creek.

### What happens because of poor water quality

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Clean, cool water is important for people and for fish. A polluted creek can be a health threat to people who live near it and want to enjoy it. If left unchecked, it could even decrease

property values. Fish may have trouble surviving and spawning. Federal Endangered Species Act listings are sparking actions by local government to clean up waters such as Gibbons Creek and restore fish habitat, or face measures imposed by the federal government.

## **Cleaning up Gibbons Creek**

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Undoubtedly, it will take help from all who live in the Gibbons Creek watershed to clean up its waters for current and future generations.

Ecology's study -- the Gibbons Creek Fecal Coliform Total Maximum Daily Load Assessment -- recommends that additional work is needed to identify sources of elevated fecal coliform samples in the creek. The assessment recommends:

- An inventory of farm animals in the area;
- An assessment of animal waste systems and identification of farms that may be contributing to excess levels of fecal coliform runoff to the creek;
- A septic survey to identify failing septic tanks; and
- A land-use analysis of the entire basin to identify other potential sources of fecal coliform bacteria contamination.

## **How you can get involved**

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Ecology is working with local interests to develop a framework for improving water quality in the Gibbons Creek watershed. The first step is to address the fecal coliform bacteria pollution. Ecology wants to hear from people who live in the watershed to get public involvement in the development of the final cleanup plan.

Ecology's water quality report -- "Gibbons Creek Fecal Coliform Total Maximum Daily Load Assessment" -- is available at the Washougal City Hall at 1701 C Street, telephone 360-835-8501 and at the Vancouver Department of Ecology office at 2108 Grand Boulevard, telephone: 360- 690-7171. It can also be found on Department of Ecology's website at <http://www.wa.gov/ecology/biblio/96316.html>

## **Public meeting**

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You are invited to a public meeting to discuss Gibbons Creek water cleanup planning. It will be from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 15, at Jemtegaard Middle School, Commons Room, 35300 SE Evergreen Boulevard, Washougal.

## **For more information**

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For more information or to get on Ecology's mailing list to receive information about Gibbons Creek, contact Rusty Post, Department of Ecology, Vancouver Field Office, 2108 Grand Boulevard, Vancouver, WA 98661-4622; telephone: 360-690-4787; e-mail: [rpos461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:rpos461@ecy.wa.gov)