



Water Cleanup Plans

Ecology seeks comments on plan to clean up bacteria in Snohomish River tributaries

Issue

The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) has completed a draft of the Water Cleanup Plan to reduce or eliminate bacteria contamination in the tributaries that feed the Snohomish River. The tributaries are Quilceda and Allen Creeks, French Creek, the Marshland Basin, the Pilchuck River, and Woods Creek. The cleanup plan was developed with input from tribes, local governments, and interested citizens in order to meet federal total maximum daily load (TMDL) requirements.

You are invited to comment on the plan from December 27, 2000, until January 31, 2001. Once the public comment period has ended and Ecology determines how to incorporate the input it receives, the agency will submit the plan to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for approval. Upon approval by EPA, Ecology will work with tribes, local government, organizations, and interested citizens on how to best implement the plan. This detailed planning effort will be coordinated with other activities currently underway or planned for Snohomish River tributary watersheds.

Background

As one of Washington's fastest growing counties, Snohomish County faces many water quality challenges. The Snohomish River, which flows from the confluence of the Skykomish and Snoqualmie rivers near Monroe to the Puget Sound at Everett, has not been meeting state water quality standards. Ecology completed a water quality study of the tributaries in 1997 that included historical data compiled by Snohomish County and the Tulalip Tribes. The study concluded that these streams and rivers failed to meet state water quality standards for fecal coliform bacteria and dissolved oxygen.

In 1999, Ecology developed a Water Cleanup Plan for the Snohomish River to meet and stay within mandated water quality standards. This plan is now being used to control the permitted sources of pollution on the river. There are, however, other sources of water pollution to the Snohomish River that must also be addressed.

Pollution from industrial sources that have legal permits to discharge into the river system is called "point source pollution." We can literally point to the pipe that is discharging pollutants. Most point source pollution is controlled through permits which outline the types and amount of contaminants that can be released into a particular river system on a daily, monthly, or annual basis.

While "point source pollution" is strictly controlled and regulated, the larger threat to the Snohomish River system and other state waterways is from pollution caused by leaking septic systems, runoff from road beds, driveways and parking lots, livestock and pet wastes, over-fertilization, and other human activities. Each of us contributes just a little pollution but taken together, the cumulative effects pose a serious threat to water quality. Pollution from

these sources is called “nonpoint source pollution.” The tributaries flowing into the Snohomish River are polluted with bacteria from nonpoint sources and must be made clean in order for the Snohomish River to meet water quality standards.

Water cleanup plan for Snohomish River tributaries for bacteria

While the Water Cleanup Plan of 1999 addressed the point sources of bacteria for the Snohomish River, this Water Cleanup Plan addresses nonpoint sources of bacteria that flow into the tributaries of the river and then flow into the Snohomish River.

We have developed the TMDL of bacteria that the tributaries to the Snohomish River can accept from nonpoint sources and still meet the state water quality standards. Developing a TMDL for nonpoint sources means:

- Allocating the amount of bacteria that can be in the water at the points of sampling,
- Taking into account seasonal variations,
- Providing a margin of safety,
- Providing for follow-up monitoring up to five years later,
- Identifying sources of funding for programs to reduce the pollution,
- A summary of the implementation strategy designed to reduce pollution.

What comes next

After a TMDL is developed and approved by EPA, we will use the strategy to work with the local communities and organizations to develop a detailed implementation plan to meet TMDL goals. Where programs or organizations are already in place and working toward these goals, we would like to join with them to support their work. We can provide an array of resources, including: technical knowledge of source control strategies and Best Management Practices, funding sources, the ability to redirect activities, public involvement expertise, and the authority and funding to enforce water quality standards when needed.

How you can comment

The cleanup plan is titled “Snohomish River Tributaries Fecal Coliform Total Maximum Daily Load: Submittal Report-Draft Water Cleanup Plan.” You may review the cleanup plan in your community at the following locations:

Everett Public Library
2702 Hoyt Avenue
Everett, WA 98201
(425) 257-8000

Snohomish Library
105 Cedar Street
Snohomish, WA 98290
(360) 568-2898

Or you may review the cleanup plan on the Internet at: www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0010087.html
Or you may request a copy from Ecology’s Water Quality Public Involvement by calling (425) 649-7213.

Please send written comments by January 31, 2001 to:

Robert Wright
Department of Ecology
Water Quality Program
3190 - 160th Avenue SE
Bellevue, WA 98008-5452

For more information, call Susan Lee at (425) 649-7213. For this information in alternative formats or other special accommodations, please call (425) 649-7213 or (425) 649-4259 (TDD).