

Washington State Department of Transportation Updated Highway Runoff Manual

The Washington State Department of Ecology's (Ecology) stormwater permit for the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) requires new design standards for stormwater management facilities. WSDOT met the new design standards in an updated Highway Runoff Manual. In addition, Ecology approved a WSDOT proposal to meeting the manual's triggered retrofit obligations by building some flexibility into where these obligations are met. This will ensure that WSDOT is better able to leverage its construction dollars to address the highest environmental priorities.

Q: Where do the new design standards apply?

A: The new design standards apply to any new or replaced segment of highway that meets Ecology's thresholds for application of runoff treatment and flow controls. For these projects in Western Washington, the new design would return high runoff flows to natural land cover conditions, such as when it was forested, compared to those existing just prior to project construction.

Q: How can WSDOT's investments better protect and improve water quality?

A: Ecology and WSDOT are implementing a new approach to reduce adverse flow and pollutant impacts from any applicable road surface. This new approach prevents additional impacts at the project site while allowing WSDOT to control runoff rates and provide treatment for project-driven stormwater retrofit obligations for an equivalent amount of highway at different locations. WSDOT may select different locations only where the investment can achieve a greater environmental benefit.

WSDOT must still treat runoff from all new pavement and control runoff rates to pre-project levels.

WSDOT Permit Focus Sheet Series

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Stormwater Runoff—Flow Control and Treatment



SR 99-South 284th St. to South 272nd St.

Where can we best invest our environmental protection funds?

The new, more flexible approach would allow WSDOT to site flow controls and runoff treatment in alternative locations if doing so produced greater environmental benefit.

Contact information:

Bill Hashim
bhas461@ecy.wa.gov

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Q: What areas will WSDOT target for upgrades?

A: WSDOT could select alternate sites for stormwater retrofit upgrades in areas based on the highest environmental benefit.

Q: What criteria will WSDOT use to select surface waters with the greatest need for environmental protection?

A: Road surfaces targeted for priority retrofit include those that discharge into waters threatened by encroaching urbanization, erosion, or pollution from outfalls, or waters that provide drinking water or vital fish habitat among other factors.

Q: How would areas selected be associated with a particular highway project?

A: Using the prioritization method mentioned above, WSDOT would select targeted areas as close to the highway project as possible while optimizing environmental benefits. WSDOT would look first within the project limits itself; second, they would look within the basin or watershed where the project is located, and last within the region of the state (i.e., Puget Sound basin, western Washington—outside of Puget Sound, or eastern Washington).

Q: Would federal and tribal lands be affected?

A: No. Ecology's permit does not regulate stormwater discharges on federal and tribal lands. Any WSDOT projects conducted on tribal and federal lands must comply with tribal and federal standards and laws.

Q: Will local governments be able to weigh in on where WSDOT proposes to use the new approach?

A: Yes. WSDOT's prioritization process includes contacting governments with jurisdictional to factor in local knowledge in selecting retrofit opportunities. Additionally, highway construction projects will continue to go through SEPA and NEPA processes (State Environmental Policy Act, National Environmental Policy Act). WSDOT will discuss the new stormwater approach for flow control and treatment in the SEPA and NEPA process.

Q: What project requirements are not transferable to other locations?

A: WSDOT must provide stormwater treatment for any new impervious surfaces at or near the project site. In addition, WSDOT must not cause an increase in runoff flow rates from any project construction or post-construction site.

Q: What are the benefits of this environmental-priority driven approach?

A: The new approach will provide environmental benefits above the level WSDOT could achieve by limiting investments only to project locations. This approach better supports salmon recovery and similar strategies designed to provide environmental protection for watersheds as a whole.

Q: Where can I go for more information?

A: You can visit www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/stormwater/municipal/wsdot.html or www.wsdot.wa.gov/Environment/waterquality.