

We All Share Responsibility to Protect Our Waters



The Department of Ecology (Ecology) and several Clean Samish Initiative organizations are working together to clean up pollution in the Samish River and other freshwater streams that flow into Samish Bay. The Initiative partners include Washington State's departments of Agriculture and Health; Skagit County's departments of Health, Planning, and Public Works; Skagit Conservation District; tribal governments; and non-profit organizations.

Samish River Water Quality Plan

After earlier data showed fecal coliform bacteria problems in the Samish Watershed, Ecology conducted a study in 2006 and 2007 to measure the flow of watershed streams and calculate the bacteria 'load' where samples were collected. The study, and later monitoring data, showed the Samish River and other streams carried too much bacteria to Samish Bay. Despite some improvement, that situation continues.

When water bodies do not meet state water quality standards, the federal Clean Water Act requires that Ecology develop a water quality implementation plan (*known as a TMDL or 'total maximum daily load' assessment*). The plan describes the amount and sources of bacteria pollution in the watershed, determines how much pollution the waters can absorb without exceeding clean water standards, and offers corrective solutions. It was approved in October of 2009 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Ecology is working with our watershed partners to protect the health of people and the environment, and to provide the public with useful information

WHY IT MATTERS

The Samish watershed needs your help. Learn how you and your neighbors can help protect and clean up the Samish River and other creeks and streams that feed it.

Visit Ecology's Samish website:

www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/tmdl/samish/index.html

Visit Skagit County's Samish website:

www.skagitcounty.net/cleanwater

Contact Information

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Special accommodations:

To ask about the availability of this document in a version for the visually impaired, call the Water Quality Program at 360-407-6404.

Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability, call 877-833-6341.

The plan goes on to outline the responsibilities of local government, livestock and pet owners, recreational users, owners of onsite sewage systems, and those who manage fields to attract waterfowl. To summarize, it includes:

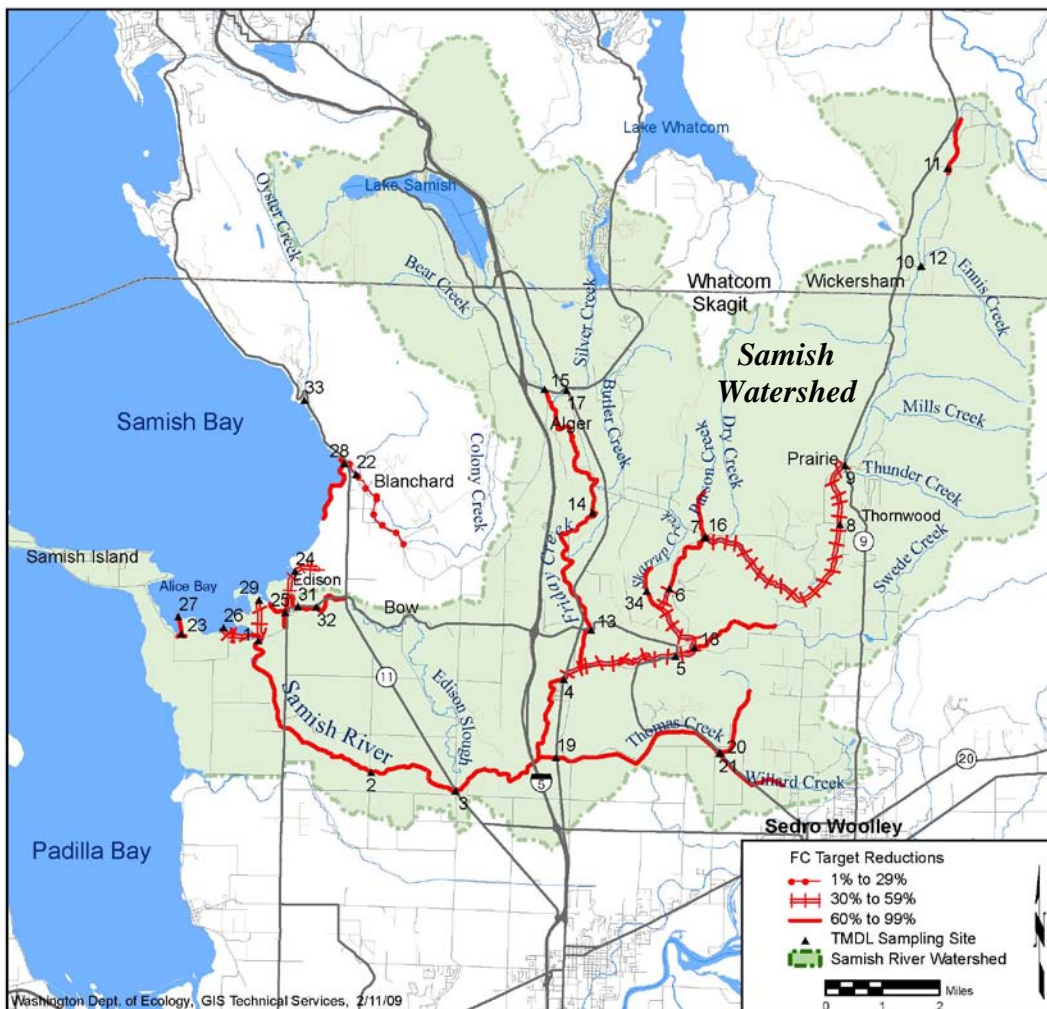
- A scientific evaluation of how fecal coliform bacteria affect the water quality of the Samish River and bay.
- A technical analysis of the sources of the bacteria.
- An action plan to control pollutant sources and help protect water quality.

What are the sources of fecal coliform bacteria?

The load of bacteria carried by the main stem of the Samish River increases as it flows from the headwaters in Whatcom County near Wickersham, to its mouth near Samish Island Road. The pollution burden generally increases with runoff from adjacent properties and from tributary creeks (Parsons, Skarrup, Swede, Friday, Thomas, and others). Sources of these bacteria related to humans are illegally-disposed or mismanaged *domestic* animal wastes (cattle, horses, poultry,

and other animals, including dogs and cats), and illegal sanitary connections or poorly-managed or failing onsite sewer systems that leak to streams. Also, people who hunt, fish, boat, and engage in other forms of recreation without properly disposing of their waste put health at risk, and hurt water quality.

Bacteria sources not related to humans include pigeons, seabirds and waterfowl, rats, raccoons, squirrels, beavers, muskrats, deer, and other wild mammals.



Map shows how much bacteria discharges to the bay, river, and creeks must be reduced.

What can Samish residents do?

Fixing fecal coliform contamination problems means each of us looking at what we do (or don't do) on our property to prevent sewage, manure, or other pollution sources from reaching public waters. Not doing so is more than annoying and inconsiderate – it could be illegal!

To be a *good steward* of your watershed, here are some important things you can do:

- Homeowners of onsite sewage systems are required by Skagit Health Dept. to arrange for regular inspections of their systems to make sure they are working properly.
- Small farm owners must collect and cover properly-located manure so that rain does not carry bacteria and nutrients into ditches and streams.
- Those spreading poultry, dairy, and livestock manure should keep it away from streams and ditches and must not spread just prior to rain or in wet conditions which create high potential for polluting runoff. Dairies must adhere to Washington State's Nutrient Management Act and must be extra-vigilant in observing U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service guidelines for manure spreading.
- Livestock producers and small farm owners cannot allow animal access into ditches and streams; effective fencing and vegetative buffers should be used to exclude.
- Ask help from the Skagit Conservation District (CD). Well-trained CD staff can provide free technical assistance for farm planning and may be able to help with cost-share assistance.
- Recreationists must use proper waste management when boating, fishing, hunting, hiking, and camping. *Be a good citizen!*
- Call the Spill Hotline if you see a spill or illegal dumping: 800-OILS-911.

What role do partner Skagit agencies and organizations have?

Skagit County's Health, Planning, and Public Works departments; the Skagit Conservation District; Skagit Conservation Education Alliance; Native-American tribal governments; state Departments of Agriculture and Health; and other groups and individuals continue to work with Ecology to make this an effective *water quality implementation plan*.

The Samish Implementation Plan (TMDL) requests the following partner agency actions:

- Skagit Health to fully implement its Onsite Sewage (OSS) Management program requiring homeowners and businesses in the Samish watershed to have onsite systems inspected by a certified OSS inspector.
- Skagit Planning and Development Services to work with Skagit Conservation District, Ecology and other partners to improve education and outreach to livestock owners regarding manure best management practices and water quality protection.
- Skagit County explicitly requires that livestock be excluded from streams and ditches with water quality problems in the next update to the Critical Areas Ordinance for areas of ongoing agriculture – Skagit County Code 14.24.120.

- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife works with Ecology to review ditch and stream riparian conditions near conservation areas planted to attract waterfowl, to ensure protection of water quality.
- Washington State Department of Agriculture will continue inspections of dairies under the state Nutrient Management Program. Dairies applying manure as fertilizer need to ensure water quality protection of streams and ditches by implementing grass filter strips following Natural Resource Conservation Service guidelines.
- Washington State Department of Agriculture, Ecology, and other appropriate agencies--such as Skagit Conservation District to help find solutions for agricultural producers who identify economic challenges to best uses of excess livestock manure.
- Ecology, agriculture-related agencies, and poultry/egg processors work together to review practices used for poultry manure disposal and spreading.

The *Clean Samish Initiative* is a partnership of the organizations listed above and many other governmental and non-governmental groups, including the Puget Sound Partnership. This effort initiated by Ecology in fall 2009 has become an important driver for concerted efforts by many of the members. Recently, Skagit County has accepted funding and a leadership role in cleaning up the Samish Watershed. This has resulted in focusing resources on accomplishing essential work that promises to lead to significant improvements in the health of the Samish Watershed and Samish Bay. A great deal more work is needed.

Perhaps the most important role in the health of the Samish Watershed is that of individual citizens working as stewards and water quality supporters.



Contacts: For updates on Samish Water Quality Implementation Plan (TMDL), send your E-mail address to: slaw461@ecy.wa.gov. Also, see these important local organizations:

- Skagit County Onsite Sewage System Program and requirements: Corinne Story, Skagit Health Department: corinnes@co.skagit.wa.us
- For farm planning and technical assistance: John Schuh, Skagit Conservation District: john@skagitcd.org