

Cities, Schools, and Clean Water

A city works with local schools to protect water quality

Introduction

Most people appreciate the environment and want to protect it. But many times pollution occurs because folks are unaware of the right thing to do. Early education on the importance of good water quality and factors causing pollution is the “ounce of prevention” that leads to a “pound of cure.” For this reason, the city of Marysville is working closely with local schools to provide education programs that include water quality lessons.

Problem

Local school districts face a great challenge preparing their students for adult life and competition in the global economy. Expectations for student learning are high, and fully funding all the needed programs can be difficult. Schools must achieve the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) goals, with all students meeting the state’s Essential Academic Learning Requirements for 11 different content areas. The extensive and complicated requirements of the WASL system make the use of ready-made education “kits” a good idea for many districts. The downside of these nationally-produced kits is the lack of relevance to local watersheds and the specific pollution problems they may be facing.



Ecology recently issued new National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) municipal stormwater permits to cities and counties across Washington State. The permits require local governments to educate their citizens about stormwater pollution so that they can help keep pollution under control. The city of Marysville found a way to help meet the new permit requirements and provide water quality education in local schools.

Project goals

The city quickly identified the Marysville School District as a key partner to help inform its citizens about stormwater pollution. The city charges the school district a surface water fee for managing stormwater to prevent flooding and pollution problems. So, Marysville decided that the surface water fees collected from the school district would be best spent on educating local youth on the importance of protecting water quality.

To do this, the city needed to amend their local ordinances, present the idea to their local school district, and work with the district on an acceptable water quality curriculum.



Stormwater pollution

Milestones and outcomes

The city of Marysville started by consulting with other local governments to see if they had a similar program working with schools. They built upon an effort started in Snohomish County and added a new section to their city’s stormwater utility ordinance.

The first challenge they faced was how to structure the new partnership with the school district. Surface water fees paid by the school district

would be reduced if the District met the city’s criteria for educating K-12 students. The city crafted language explaining its criteria for the reduction. Schools could receive up to 100 percent reductions in their surface water fees based upon the ability of their educational program to promote appreciation and stewardship of water resources. The program must also include information on stormwater pollution.

To qualify for the fee reduction, the Marysville School District needed to submit their curriculum plan to the city council. The city council would then determine the amount of reduction based upon the scope, cost, and anticipated effectiveness of the program. School District staff worked closely with educators from the Stilly/Snohomish Fisheries Enhancement Task Force (SSFETF) to develop and teach a program based on the well known “Project Wet” curriculum. Their team tailored the program to local waters through on-site visits to the district’s new Jones Creek Outdoor Learning Center and its Allen Creek Streamside Learning Site. City of Marysville staff also pitched in and agreed to provide water quality lessons.



Project highlights

The reduction in surface water fees translated into the development of 5th and 8th grade lesson plans. The plans selected two learning objectives under each of the four goals outlined in “Environmental Education Guidelines for Washington Schools.” Lesson plans were supplemented with classroom visits, field trips, storm drain stenciling by 8th grade students, and other activities where students learn about water quality and things they can do to keep local waters clean. The lessons supported the schools goals of meeting WASL requirements while helping the city of Marysville meet their permit requirements. The time and resources spent are considered good investments in today’s water quality and tomorrow’s water stewards.

The new program reduced the district’s surface water fees by nearly \$100,000 per year and provides additional water quality education to about 2,500 students per year.

You can read Marysville’s stormwater fee reduction language in Section 14.19.080(1)(b) in the [Marysville Stormwater Utility Ordinance No. 2654](#) as well as the Marysville School District’s [water quality education plan](#). For basic information on learning to communicate effectively with schools about meeting WASL requirements, see [WASLizing Your Info](#).

Partners

City of Marysville Surface Water Management
Marysville School District
Stilly/Snohomish Fisheries Enhancement Task Force

Funding

The city of Marysville spends about 25 days a year to help out with lessons at local schools.

For more information

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