

Water Quality Monitoring Study

In October 2009, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) will begin a water quality monitoring study of the White Salmon River and its tributaries. The study will measure concentrations of fecal coliform bacteria at several sites in the watershed. High levels of fecal coliform increase health risks for people swimming, wading, or fishing in the river.

Background

The White Salmon River is a largely rural stream that begins on Mount Adams in south-central Washington and flows south for 45 miles before it enters the Columbia River. The White Salmon River and its tributaries drain approximately 386 square miles of Skamania, Yakima, and Klickitat Counties. The river is known for its scenery and recreational opportunities. Data collected between 1992 and 2001 showed the White Salmon River and three of its tributaries – Gilmer Creek, Rattlesnake Creek, and Trout Lake Ditch – failed water quality standards for fecal coliform. In 2004, the White Salmon River and three tributaries were placed on the Department of Ecology’s impaired waterbodies list, triggering the need to develop a water cleanup plan.

Why are we doing this study?

Water quality data collected in 2007 and 2008 in Rattlesnake Creek and in the White Salmon River near the town of Husum indicate both sites meet water quality standards for fecal coliform. This good news suggests recent changes in land use and improvements in land management in the watershed could lead to removal from the impaired waterbodies list for fecal coliform. Instead of starting a cleanup plan process, Ecology has decided to do a short, relatively inexpensive study that will accomplish two goals. First, we will collect data at a number of monitoring stations in the White Salmon River watershed to determine if fecal coliform water quality standards are met. Second, if any stations fail the standards, we will collect data at additional sites to help identify fecal coliform sources.

WHY IT MATTERS

Water quality standards were established to sustain public health and public enjoyment and the propagation and protection of fish, shellfish, and wildlife. The Department of Ecology is responsible for cleaning up waterbodies that don’t meet water quality standards. We have found we can best accomplish the goal of protecting water quality by working cooperatively with local agencies and landowners who share our interest in the watershed.

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Special accommodations:

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Study details

Water quality data will be collected twice a month from October 2009 through September 2010 at seven monitoring stations in the White Salmon River watershed (see map below). If more sites are added to the study, they will be sampled on the same schedule. A final study report will be published in June 2011. Ecology staff will work with local agencies and landowners to identify and initiate activities to address any remaining sources of fecal coliform.

