



2017 Geographic Response Plans Statewide Review

Executive Summary

The 2015 Oil Transportation Safety Act (now codified in RCW 90.56.569) directed the following of the Department of Ecology:

- (1) The department must provide to the relevant policy and fiscal committees of the senate and house of representatives:
 - (a) A review of all state geographic response plans and any federal requirements as needed in contingency plans required under RCW [90.56.210](#) and [88.46.060](#) by December 31, 2015; and
 - (b) Updates every two years, beginning December 31, 2017, and ending December 31, 2021, consistent with the requirements of RCW [43.01.036](#), as to the progress made in completing state and federal geographic response plans as needed in contingency plans required under RCW [90.56.060](#), [90.56.210](#), and [88.46.060](#).
- (2) The department must contract, if practicable, with eligible independent third parties to ensure completion by December 1, 2017, of at least fifty percent of the geographic response plans as needed in contingency plans required under RCW [90.56.210](#) and [88.46.060](#) for the state.
- (3) All requirements in this section are subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for the specific purposes described.

This is the second report from Ecology on the progress of GRP development.

Geographic Response Plans (GRPs) are a cornerstone to a rapid, aggressive, and well-coordinated oil spill response in Washington. They take the guesswork out of the response during the early hours of a spill. They give first responders prioritized tactical information for spill response and mitigate damages to natural, cultural, and economic resources at risk. After efforts to contain and recover an oil spill, GRPs are the next highest priority in a response. They can be undertaken without hesitation or direction from a Unified Command.

GRPs are dramatically improving Washington's readiness to respond to spills, especially along oil train routes and pipelines in Central and Eastern Washington. Since the last report, Ecology updated seven and created ten additional GRPs, primarily addressing the highest ranked inland spill risks along rail and pipeline corridors (see Table 1). Including these new GRPs, there are now 42 such plans throughout the state (see Figure 1). The new GRPs were completed in time to be cited by crude oil carrying railroads when they submitted contingency plans to the state this year.

The law also required that “The department must contract, if practicable, with eligible independent third parties to ensure completion by December 1, 2017, of at least fifty percent of the geographic response plans as needed in contingency plans required under RCW [90.56.210](#) and [88.46.060](#) for the state.” We used contractors to conduct field verification for 19 existing GRPs between 2014-2017. We also leveraged contractors for an additional ten new GRPs in 2017 to exceed the 50% mandated by the legislature.

The largest oil handlers (commercial vessels, refineries, oil pipelines, terminals, and railroads) are required to develop oil spill contingency plans. A contingency plan is a risk management tool used to demonstrate industry’s readiness to respond to large oil spills. Federal and state regulations mandate that oil spill contingency plans include information on sensitive sites and tactics to protect resources at risk from spills. The GRPs fulfill these requirements. GRPs are created as part of the Northwest Area Contingency Plan¹ and are referenced in industry’s contingency plans.

For 2018-2019, Ecology will continue to update GRPs based on the risk rankings defined in the [2015 Legislative report](#). The new work will address the older plans in marine waters that have not been updated in the last 10 years and lack detail in describing the tactics. They also need updates to address new federal requirements to include information on endangered species that may be at risk from oil spills (see Table 2).

The best practice to remain prepared for spills is to have the resources to update each GRP on a five-year cycle, and to carefully capture lessons learned during tactical deployments (drills, spills, and trainings) so that we verify the GRPs will work when spills occur.

Preparing for a rapid, aggressive, and well-coordinated response to oil spills

The Department of Ecology prepares for oil spills by developing oil spill strategies in GRPs statewide. These strategies give first responders prioritized information and pre-identified tactics to mitigate damages to natural, cultural, and economic resources at risk from oil spills. The 2015 Washington State Legislature (ESHB 1449) directed Ecology to review “all state geographic response plans (GRPs) and “federal requirements as needed in contingency plans” by December 31, 2015, and continue reporting every two years until 2021. This is the second report from Ecology reporting on the progress of GRP development.

GRPs guide effective spill responses

GRPs exist within a hierarchy of government and industry mandated oil spill plans that guide spill responses. They are published as appendices to the Northwest Area Contingency Plan. GRPs have three main objectives:

¹ In the Pacific Northwest the Area Contingency Plan includes Washington, Oregon and Idaho. The plan outlines policies for response to oil and hazardous materials. <https://www.rrt10nwac.com/>

- Pre-identify resources at risk of injury or damage from oil spills, including natural, economic, or cultural values for the state.
- Present pre-approved oil spill tactics to be deployed in the initial hours of a response, including access routes, equipment, supplies needed, recommended personnel, and any special considerations or property owner notifications.
- Provide tactical data to responders for spills that will require prolonged cleanup.

The development of GRPs is overseen by state and federal agencies and includes conferring with local spill response experts, tribes, ports, industry experts, and local communities. Public involvement during the development process is essential to ensure that the sites selected and the tactics developed reflect the priorities of local communities and resource users and owners.

GRPs, by intention, do not pre-identify every action to be taken during the early hours of a spill response, but instead provide direction for only immediate actions to be taken.

The absence of a GRP tactic for a sensitive site does not imply that the site has less value or that it would not be protected during a spill. As a response evolves, real-time information is used to identify additional strategies and tactics beyond what is pre-identified by GRPs.

Completed GRPs in 2015-2017

By July of 2017, Ecology reviewed and updated seven existing GRPs and created another ten within areas that had no plans mainly along inland railroad routes and pipeline corridors. The GRPs were completed in time to be cited in the crude oil rail contingency plans, also required under the Oil Transportation Safety Act. In total, there are now 42 GRPs throughout the state (see Figure 1).

Table 1: Existing GRPs and new GRPs developed to address rail routes completed in 2017

2015 Updates to pre-existing GRPs	2017 Creation of new GRPs for rail routes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admiralty Inlet • Hood Canal • Lower Skagit River • Lower Yakima River • Nooksack River • Samish River • Snake River Ice Harbor Pool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palouse • Puyallup-White River • Stillaguamish • Sumas • Upper Columbia River • Upper Green River • Upper Yakima River • Warden Washington • Washington Deschutes • Wenatchee

Next Priorities for 2018–2019

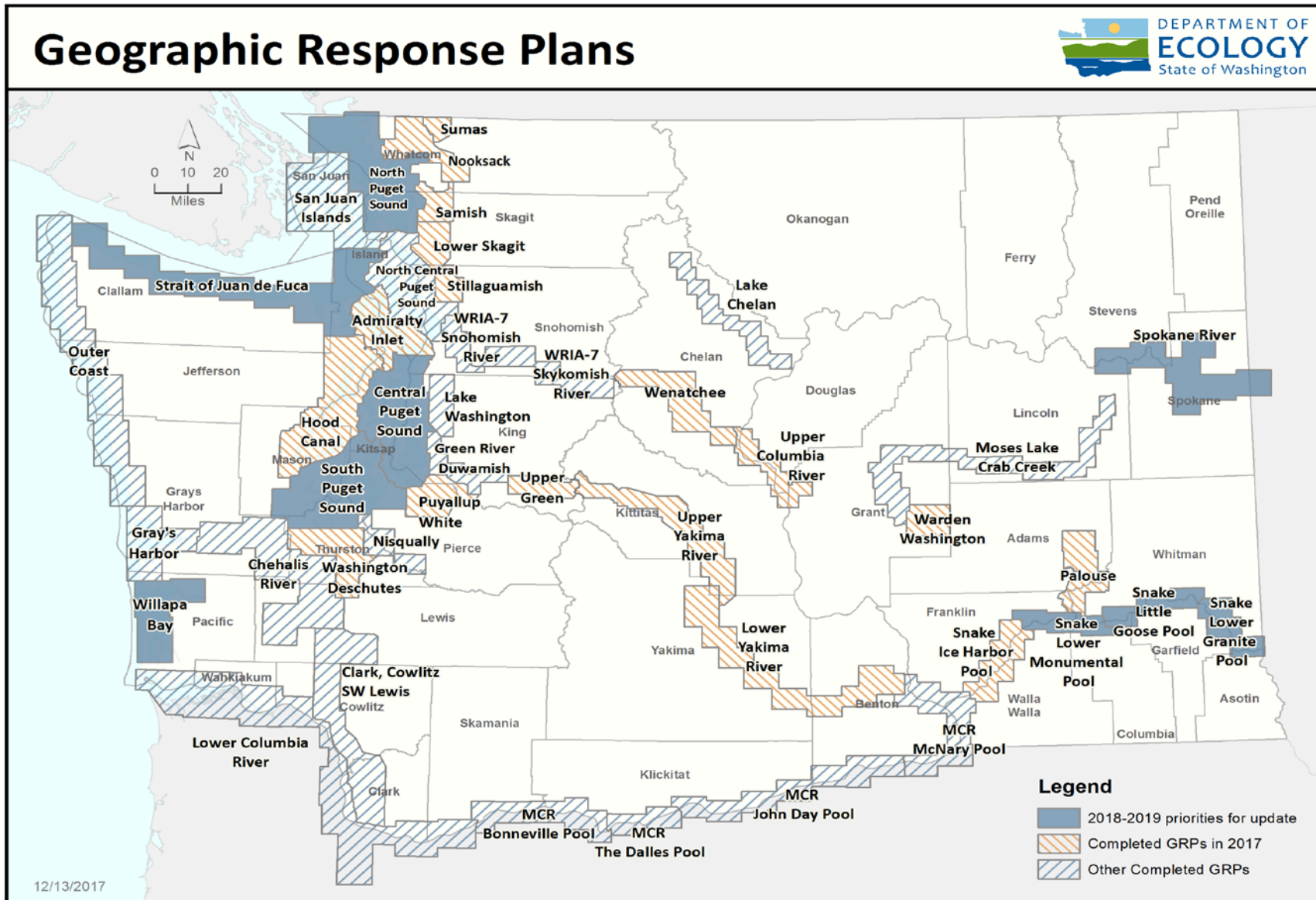
New federal requirements and practices are in place for area contingency plans in the United States to incorporate endangered species information. These must be included at each stage of oil spill planning and response activities and must include information relating to threatened and endangered species in the GRPs. Including this information supports decisions on the most appropriate cleanup methods for habitats, maximizing oil recovery, and minimizing impacts to species and habitats. It is critical that Ecology include identification of endangered species in the Northwest Area Contingency Plan. Only the more recent GRPs have this information. In addition, the oldest GRPs are not written with details we now provide, nor do they benefit from spatial planning tools and technology. The following plans have been chosen for the next priorities because of the age of the plan, the lack of detailed strategy diagrams, and potential risk of oil spills from facilities, vessels and rail.

In the last several years, we were able to leverage contractors to conduct field work to maximize resources on GRP development. However, due to the program’s budget shortfall, work may fall entirely to staff and so delay plan updates.

Table 2: A list of 2018–2019 GRP priorities

GRP	Last updated
Central Puget Sound	2007
North Central Puget Sound	2003
South Puget Sound	2009
Strait of Juan de Fuca	2008
Snake River Lower Monumental Pool	1997
Willapa Bay	2003
Spokane River	2011
Snake River Little Goose Pool	1997
Snake River Lower Granite Pool	1997

Figure 1: Map of Washington State's GRP coverage. For a listing of GRPs, visit our partner site GRP page at <http://www.oilspills101.wa.gov/northwest-area-contingency-plan/geographic-response-plans-grps/>.



Publication information

This report is available on the Department of Ecology's website at <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/SummaryPages/1708021.html>

Contact information

Author: Nhi Irwin

Spill Prevention, Preparedness, and Response Program

P.O. Box 47600

Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Washington State Department of Ecology - www.ecology.wa.gov

- Headquarters, Olympia (360) 407-6000
- Northwest Regional Office, Bellevue (425) 649-7000
- Southwest Regional Office, Olympia (360) 407-6300
- Central Regional Office, Union Gap (509) 575-2490
- Eastern Regional Office, Spokane (509) 329-3400

***Accommodation Requests:** To request ADA accommodation for disabilities, or printed materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at (360) 407-7455, or visit <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/accessibility.html>. Persons with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. Persons with speech disability may call TTY at (877) 833-6341.*