

# Washington State Stormwater Strategy



## WHY IT MATTERS

Runoff from urban streets, yards, homes, and businesses can pollute lakes, streams, and marine water bodies across Washington State.

The problem is well understood. Stormwater erodes habitat and carries oils, metals, nutrients, pesticides, bacteria, trash, and particles like tire rubber and microplastics.

The management practices required through our state's stormwater permitting program prevent and reduce impacts, but more is needed.

### Contact/More information

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## Washington State is a leader in stormwater management

Washington's rich natural environment demands the best. Local governments, ports, and businesses drive on-the-ground stormwater improvements. Ecology's science, funding, and regulatory leadership supports their successes.

### And we must continue to lead the way

Stormwater was first controlled to prevent flooding. Addressing pollutants began in the early 1980s. Washington started permitting stormwater per the Clean Water Act in 1987. By 1995, the largest local governments were managing their stormwater and requiring developers to improve practices.

- 1980s-2007** Ecology began regulating stormwater from over 5,000 industrial and construction sites, and from our largest municipalities.
- 2007-2012** Most urban areas received stormwater permits. Up to this point, our focus was to stop stormwater pollution from becoming worse as our cities and counties grew.
- 2012-Now** Now we are working to make it better. Low impact development manages rain closer to where it falls. Old infrastructure is slowly being retrofitted, but needs far exceed current available resources.

Regulations, better practices, and funding are critical to further improve stormwater quality to benefit our communities, and better protect Washington's waters and our native species such as salmon and orcas.

### Our strategic priorities

Washington's strategic priorities match the complexity of the stormwater problem with the tools and resources we have to address them.

Manage  
growth

Prevent  
toxics

Clean up  
legacy  
pollutants

## Why is stormwater still a statewide issue?

**Managing growth** – We risk losing ground as our region grows. Low impact development and other practices are working, but more is needed at the watershed scale to prevent water quality problems as urban areas expand.

**Preventing toxics** – Banning harmful chemicals like copper in brakes and the toxics in fire fighting foams is helping. But other chemicals, like 6PPD-quinone, continue to pose new challenges.

**Controlling nutrients** – Investments in education and best practices to manage nutrients from urban landscapes is improving water quality. However, unmanaged stormwater is carrying excess nutrients into our waters. This contributes to low oxygen levels and more algae blooms.

**Cleaning up legacy pollutants** – We have invested hundreds of millions of dollars cleaning up contaminated water and sediment and installing stormwater treatment retrofits in older neighborhoods to prevent toxic runoff. However, the investment demand remains in the billions of dollars.

## Our approach to stormwater management

### Science—our compass

Science informs policy and defines the scope of our environmental problems. Programs like [Stormwater Action Monitoring](#) tell us where our efforts are working and where they are not so we can adjust. Targeted studies help us be more effective.

### Funding—incentives

Funding, regulatory flexibility, and rewards for best practices, encourage creative approaches and new technologies. Our [Stormwater Financial Assistance Program](#) directs millions of dollars each year for stormwater activities and retrofits.

### Regulations—drivers

We create a level playing field. Our regulations provide clarity and certainty, and are informed by strong science and ongoing policy discussions with stakeholders. Our [municipal stormwater permits](#) are key regulatory tools.

## Our strategic priority goals

**Manage growth** – Accommodate population growth in a way that avoids future cleanups and minimizes damage to aquatic habitats.

- Bolster environmental requirements already included in the Growth Management Act.
- Elevate stormwater management needs in regional transportation planning.
- Create opportunities for private investment in stormwater management.
- Support relevant and accessible scientific studies to inform stormwater managers.
- Cultivate a community of experts on low impact development.
- Promote appropriate management techniques to reduce nutrient loading.

**Prevent toxics and control nutrients** – Continue to prevent, reduce, and remove pollution at the source.

- Expand state efforts to ban and find alternatives for the most harmful chemicals.
- Expand business inspections and provide incentives to prevent sources of stormwater pollution.
- Support public education and outreach efforts to reduce chemical use and encourage proper disposal.
- Incentivize removal, replacement, and proper disposal of pollution-generating building materials.

**Cleaning up legacy pollutants** – Coordinate cleanups and stormwater treatment to prevent recontamination.

- Continue to prioritize and clean up contaminated sediment, require source control, and incentivize stormwater retrofits in the watershed.