

Focus on: Washington's Climate Resilience Strategy

The problem

Climate change threatens communities, infrastructure, and natural and working lands across Washington. For six of the past 10 years, our state has experienced drought conditions. Snowpack has decreased 25% since 1950. Flooding has caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damage and loss of life. Massive wildfires have destroyed entire neighborhoods and blanketed Washington with choking smoke. These impacts are here now and will worsen in the years to come.

What can we do, and how?

Ecology published the [Washington State Climate Resilience Strategy](#) in September 2024 as directed by the Legislature in [Chapter 70A.05 RCW](#).

The strategy addresses the most pressing impacts of climate change facing Washington:

- **Drought and reduced water supply**
- **Marine and coastal changes**
- **Flooding**
- **Extreme heat**
- **Wildfire and smoke**

Through the strategy, Ecology and nine other state agencies identified new actions the state can take to help communities, infrastructure, and natural and working lands prepare for these impacts.

Support for these new actions, in addition to the ongoing work of our agencies to support climate resilience, is essential in helping Washington prepare for the impacts of climate change.

Responsive to people and communities

The strategy prioritizes communities and populations that are most vulnerable to climate change impacts. In developing the strategy, we engaged with communities around the state. We hosted Tribal-specific listening sessions and partnered with *Front and Centered* (a community coalition group) to gather

feedback from a diverse set of organizations and individuals. We also engaged local governments, advocacy organizations, and the public through surveys, listening sessions, and a public comment period. The feedback we received helped us focus on the highest priority needs facing communities in our state.

The plan will be adapted over time as new research and information becomes available. This also enables us to address new and emerging priorities of communities and partners across the state. Ecology is required to update the strategy every four years.

Strengthening our resilience

Communities

Communities across Washington face significant, growing risks from climate impacts. Proposed actions will enhance the capacity of Tribes and local governments to implement actions through permitting assistance and technical guidance. Other work will support community infrastructure improvements and early warning systems.

Infrastructure

Resilient infrastructure is critical in an uncertain climate future. Proposed work will strengthen the resilience of infrastructure the state owns and operates. Agencies will work together to consider ways to address climate resilience with greater consistency through their infrastructure funding programs.

Natural and working lands

A healthy and resilient environment supports people and ecosystems across Washington. Our actions include work to support our state's agricultural sector through data and incentives to combat drought and extreme weather. Other actions work to make habitats like the Puget Sound and other ecosystems more resilient to climate change for the benefit of people, wildlife, and fish.

A sample of proposed actions

Preparing for reduced water availability

Ecology would fund new data collection and analyze projected water supply changes in Western Washington. This work would raise awareness of future challenges and support solution identification. Additional work would support water projects in the Columbia River Basin and use of tools like reclaimed water.

Enhancing wildfire resilience and forest health

Reforestation following wildfire events protects communities from hazards like flooding and landslides and supports habitat recovery. The Department of Natural Resources would coordinate these post-wildfire restoration activities across agencies. This work would also expand state-owned plant nursery capacity to provide a reliable supply of resilient seedlings for reforestation efforts.

Reducing obstacles for flood resilience

Many federally produced flood risk maps in Washington are out of date which slows down the construction of floodplain and salmon restoration and resilience projects. Ecology would update these flood risk maps and provide technical support to help accelerate the implementation of projects that reduce flooding risks by Tribes and local governments.

Funding this work

In December 2024, former Governor Inslee released his proposed 2025-2027 budget which included 28 budget requests made by our agencies to implement actions in the strategy. In total, Governor Inslee's proposed budget included \$303 million across the operating and capital budgets to support our actions. These requests are proposed from sources such as state bonds and dedicated accounts, many of which are specifically designated to support climate efforts, such as Climate Commitment Act accounts. Four requests are proposed under the General Fund.

What's next?

Ecology and partner agencies will start implementing the actions in the strategy, as funding allows. Additionally, proposed investments in ongoing coordination, outreach, and measuring and reporting our progress will help ensure an effective, efficient, and accountable state response to these challenges. We will continue to engage with Tribes, local governments, and other partners across the state to ensure our actions align with local needs and priorities.



Credit: Whatcom Conservation District

Responding to extreme heat

The Department of Health would support infrastructure improvements and provide technical support to improve cooling strategies for facilities that serve vulnerable populations like children and the elderly. The Department would also support interagency coordination on development of warning systems and outreach to reduce health risks from extreme heat and smoke.

Supporting the agricultural sector

Climate change poses many challenges to continued agricultural productivity and vitality. The State Conservation Commission and Department of Agriculture would support this work through on-farm irrigation efficiencies, incentive programs, disaster assistance, and technical support.



Jennifer Hennessey
jennifer.hennessey@ecy.wa.gov
360-972-5887



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