

Focus on: Ore Mining Water Quality Permit Fees

What is ore mining, processing, and refining?

Ore mining refers to mine operators who extract ores (metal-bearing rock) from underground or surface mines using machinery, explosives, or chemicals. Extraction processes include dressing (picking, sorting, washing of ores), milling (crushing, grinding, etc.), and beneficiation (processing to improve purity/quality).

The Water Quality Permitting Program protects state waters by managing when, where, and how wastewater enters the environment. Ecology is required by law to recover the costs of administering the permit program by collecting annual permit fees. These permitted sites vary in their complexity, geography, and size, and can require a substantial amount of staff time.

Rulemaking Process

Ecology updates the Water Quality Permit Fees with a rulemaking every two years. Ecology is accepting public comment on the proposed changes from March 27, 2025, 12:00 a.m. to May 20, 2025, 11:59 p.m.

See the “Provide feedback” section to find out how you can stay involved in this rulemaking. After reviewing all feedback, Ecology will consider whether any changes need to be made before adopting an updated fee schedule.

The Ore Mining fee category was originally added to the fee schedule (Chapter 173-224 WAC) in 1989, when the rule was established. We have not made any changes to the fee category and subcategories since then, while the industry has continued to change. We are proposing to restructure the fee category and subcategories to better align the fees with how the mines function now and the complexity of the permits.

The tables below compare the current fee schedule to the proposed fee schedule. These changes are intended to better reflect the activities of mining operations that currently have water quality permits and include a new fee specifically for small scale mining.

Current Fee Schedule

Ore Mining FY25 Fee Category and subcategories	FY25 Fees
Ore Mining	\$4,800
Ore Mining with physical concentration process	\$9,600
Ore Mining with physical and chemical concentration process	\$38,300

Proposed Fee Schedule

Ore Mining, Processing, Refining, Other FY26 Proposed Fee Category and subcategories	FY26-27 Proposed Fees
Active sites – Operations or Reclamation	\$40,000
Water treatment – with or without long term monitoring	\$40,000
Reclamation – long term monitoring	\$20,000
Operations in care and maintenance	\$10,000
Small scale mining – < 1,000 lbs of aggregate annually	\$1,200

The table below provides definitions for each of the proposed new fee subcategories.

New Subcategories

Proposed fee subcategories	Definitions
Active sites – Operations or Reclamation	All sites with active/reclamation activities occurring each year (including sites with water treatment systems).
Water treatment – with or without long term monitoring	Inactive sites with continuous water treatment systems for discharging waters from mining operations.
Reclamation – long term monitoring	Sites with completed reclamation that include long-term water quality monitoring.
Operations in care and maintenance	Inactive sites through temporary closure.
Small scale mining – < 1,000 lbs of aggregate annually	Sites which never exceed 1,000 lbs of aggregate annually

Questions

If you have any questions about how the proposed fee schedule would impact your permit fee, please reach out to the Fee Unit at wqfeunit@ecy.wa.gov or 1-800-633-6193, Option 2.

Provide feedback

Ecology is accepting comments from March 27, 2025, 12:00 a.m. to May 20, 2025, 11:59 p.m. We are also holding two virtual public hearings, which will include a presentation and question and answer session, followed by an opportunity to provide verbal comments.

- May 12, 5:30 p.m., [register on Zoom](#)
- May 13, 1:00 p.m., [register on Zoom](#)

Visit our webpage for this rulemaking at ecology.wa.gov/WQ-fee-rule to learn more about the proposed changes and how you can provide feedback to Ecology.

If you would like to receive announcements about this rulemaking, sign up for our [Water Quality Permit Fees email list](#)¹.



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To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6600 or email at wqfeunit@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

¹ https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WAECY/subscriber/new?topic_id=WAECY_152