

# Department of Ecology Water Resources Program Strategic Plan 2025 – 2029 Year 1 Progress Update

July 2024 – June 2025



## A Message from Water Resources Program Manager, Ria Berns

I am excited to share our Year 1 results! When we completed our Strategic Plan in July 2024, we could not have predicted what this first year was going to have in store for our team and the state. Several changes have shaped our work this past year:

- ▶ We welcomed a new Ecology director, Casey Sixkiller! Director Sixkiller is an advocate for our work and understands the need to rethink water resource management to respond to climate impacts and a growing state population.
- ▶ State agencies were placed on a hiring and spending freeze in December 2024 to help address the state's budget shortfall. We lost people and experience through retirements and departures and recentered our core work and priorities.

Major accomplishments include:

- ▶ Initiated the WRIA 1 (Nooksack) adjudication by mailing adjudication documents to landowners, establishing an online portal to track claim submissions, and reaching out to communities in the basin to build awareness and understanding.
- ▶ Updated Municipal Water Law Policy<sup>1</sup> to provide transparency and consistency from case law decisions and water right decisions that have occurred in the last 15 years (consolidations, transfers, and mitigation).

Areas of focus for the upcoming year:

- ▶ Ongoing budget challenges require that we focus on effective implementation of priority work and are mindful of staff capacity in their day-to-day responsibilities.
- ▶ We must address today's issues and lay the groundwork to tackle future challenges (e.g., climate change, population growth), and embrace new tools and technologies to advance our work.

Thank you for your continued interest in our work. If you have any questions, please reach out to our program planner, Lisa Reymann at [lisa.reymann@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:lisa.reymann@ecy.wa.gov).

Ria Berns

## Our Vision

Washington State's water resources support thriving ecosystems and communities in the face of climate change.

## Our Mission

We manage water resources to benefit all Washingtonians and to protect the natural environment for current and future generations.

## Our Values

- ▶ Public service
- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Teamwork
- ▶ Equity
- ▶ Excellence

## Transitional Changes

The Strategic Plan represents a new path for the Water Resources Program as we integrate two transformational changes to how we approach our work: a focus on climate change and environmental justice.

<sup>1</sup> <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/2411100.pdf>



## Our Year 1 Progress

**Key** ○ Little progress ● Some progress ● Significant progress

### Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources

Objectives	Year 1 Progress	Highlights
A. Protect instream resources and senior water rights today and into the future.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Made significant progress in updating our statewide compliance strategy and initiated redevelopment of our metering database to improve data accessibility and submittal processes.</li> <li>Collected data and collaborated with <a href="#">Washington State University</a> to improve the ability and effectiveness of using remote sensing to calculate evapotranspiration.</li> </ul>
B. Advance certainty about existing water rights through adjudication.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented an outreach strategy to promote awareness of WRIA 1 adjudication, support claim form completion, and overcome language, literacy, technical and ability barriers.</li> </ul>
C. Bolster dam safety and well construction inspection activities to ensure protection of public health and safety.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtained improved LIDAR data for improved inundation mapping and flood impact analysis, working with FEMA and other partners.</li> <li>Expanded well delegation program to include three additional counties, allowing locally led well inspections and greater coverage.</li> </ul>
D. Increase public understanding of water resource issues through transparency and proactive education.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessed and improved public-facing water resource communication materials to ensure accessible information is available for all Washingtonians.</li> <li>Developed <a href="#">online watershed-scale interactive maps</a> to help the public understand water rights information across the state.</li> </ul>

### Goal 2. Prepare for Changing Conditions and Needs due to Climate Change

Objectives	Year 1 Progress	Highlights
A. Build a sense of urgency to address the impacts of climate change on water resources.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built on the <a href="#">Statewide Climate Resilience Strategy</a> to elevate awareness of climate impacts on the state's water resources and administered pilot drought planning and preparedness grants to bolster drought resilience.</li> </ul>
B. Improve water supply for instream and out-of-stream needs.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided funding to six entities to increase drought resilience, all within overburdened communities.</li> </ul>
C. Promote reforms to state water law to increase the resilience of our state's water resources to climate change.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided information to the <a href="#">Ruckelshaus Center</a> on their analysis of water conservation and water use efficiency for municipal water systems.</li> <li>Conducted targeted outreach in late 2024 (for existing legislators) and early 2025 (for newly elected legislators) on water law and key water issues.</li> </ul>



### Goal 3. Hone Our Organizational Effectiveness

Objectives	Year 1 Progress	Highlights
A. Cultivate a work environment that supports and retains staff.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnered with human resources to provide education and training to all hiring managers on mitigating bias and implementing performance-based hiring directives.</li> <li>Initiated clear pathways and processes for staff to raise concerns and provide feedback to promote a culture of support and accountability through virtual suggestion box, guided team conversations, etc.</li> </ul>
B. Promote staff professional development.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated training materials and standard operating practices to assist with onboarding and job development.</li> <li>Organized quarterly job-alike meetings with annual in-person meetings for permit writers, hydrogeologists, compliance staff, metering staff, and database coordinators.</li> </ul>
C. Ensure our processes and procedures are timely, effective, and consistent statewide.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed updates to municipal and trust water policies.</li> <li>Improved cost-reimbursement processes to more effectively advance defensible permitting decisions.</li> </ul>
D. Invest in information technology to meet current and future data needs.	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created an online submittal option for water rights applications and integrated digital information into existing data systems.</li> <li>Initiated scoping of a long-term information management and modernization strategy that encompasses all related data and records systems.</li> </ul>

### Related Information

- [Water Resources Program Strategic Plan 2025-2029,](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2411022.html)  
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**Water Resources Program**  
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To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6872 or email at [WRpubs@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:WRpubs@ecy.wa.gov), or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

