



Geothermal Energy Collaborative Process

Draft Legislative Update



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- [Washington Geothermal Experience](#)²
- 2021 [Washington State Geothermal Play-Fairway Analysis](#)³

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¹ <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Passed%20Legislature/6039-S.PL.pdf#page=1>

² <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6038a47202a04a5da71c2251ec11c2c1>

³ <https://www.osti.gov/biblio/1823116>

⁴ www.ecology.wa.gov/contact

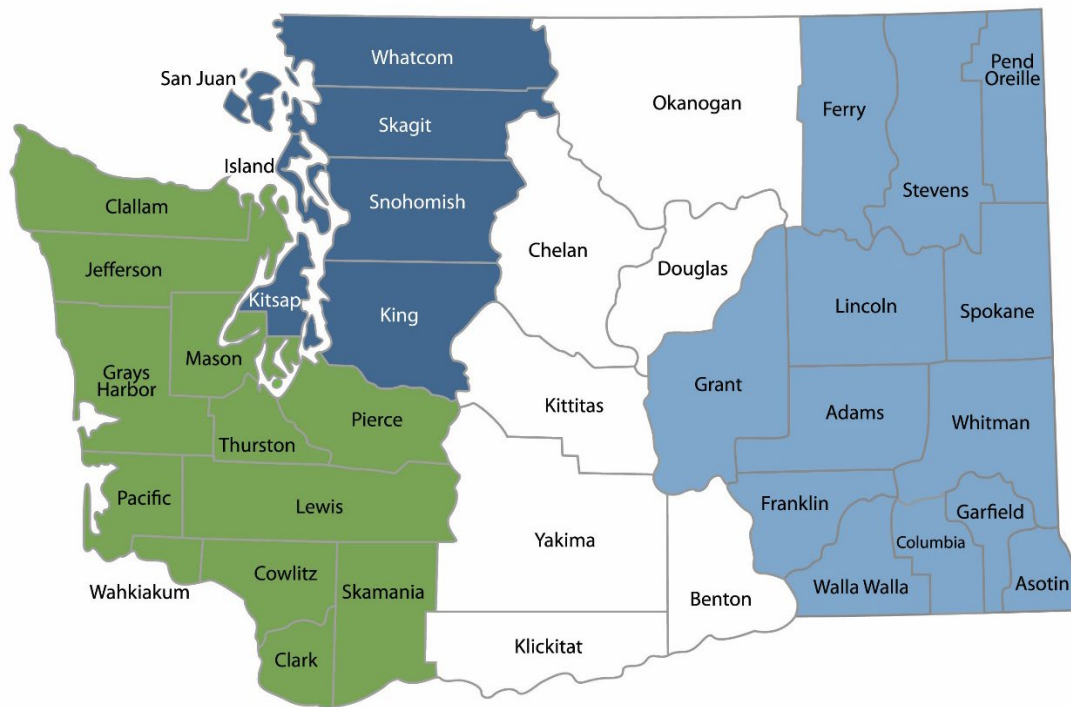
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DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

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Executive Summary

To promote the development of geothermal energy resources in Washington, the state Legislature passed [Senate Bill 6039](#) in 2024 which directed the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) to engage in a collaborative process to identify opportunities and risks associated with developing utility-scale geothermal energy for generating clean electricity. While the process has statewide considerations, it is focused on three areas the state Department of Natural Resources has identified having the greatest geothermal resource potential: Mount Baker, Mount St. Helens and the Wind River valley south of Mount St. Helens.

Geothermal energy is a low-emission source of renewable energy that can provide continuous baseload power. The effort centers on understanding how geothermal resources may contribute to the state's long-term clean energy goals, including progress toward the state Climate Commitment and Clean Energy Transformation acts which commit the state to an electricity supply free of greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

This work focuses specifically on electricity-producing geothermal applications and potential utility-scale development. While there is interest in exploring geothermal energy development in Washington, there are currently no geothermal energy projects proposed or under consideration.

This April 2026 update provides an overview about the geothermal collaborative process including information we gathered at public workshops and other outreach efforts as well as preliminary recommendations for early consideration. A final legislative report is due June 30, 2027, and will include factors that may influence site suitability such as potential impacts, mitigation strategies, geologic characteristics and proximity to electrical transmission infrastructure. It will also include an analysis of gaps in local, state and federal regulations. Combined, these reports are designed to provide a framework for understanding the opportunities, challenges and considerations associated with utility-scale geothermal energy development in Washington.

We are engaging communities, Tribes, utilities, industry, agencies and other interested parties to identify opportunities and risk as well as siting factors to consider for future geothermal energy development. There is a high level of interest in the collaborative process and how outcomes and findings will inform communities and Tribes regarding geothermal energy development.

As a result of our engagement activities, we found a wide range of questions reflecting interest in the technical feasibility of planning for and developing geothermal energy resources in Washington. These include considerations for siting and permitting, and the effects of development on Tribal rights, interests, and resources, cultural resources, water quantity and quality, endangered and sensitive species, induced seismicity, and overburdened communities.

Ecology is also researching and analyzing emerging geothermal technologies, potential impacts, mitigation strategies and facility siting considerations. The state Department of Natural Resources is also conducting seismic hazard assessments for the three geothermal focus areas.

These studies will not be completed until summer 2026. We will share study results in fall 2026 and collect additional feedback and input to include in the final legislative report scheduled for submittal June 2027.

Preliminary recommendations

This legislative update includes several preliminary recommendations for advancing geothermal energy development in Washington. The collaborative process we are leading will continue to inform, refine and expand on these preliminary recommendations and we will develop others for the final June 2027 legislative report.

- **Topic: Update the Washington State Energy Strategy**
 - To support the next iteration of the state energy strategy in 2028, fund the analysis and modeling work for geothermal energy production.
- **Topic: Expand agency coordination**
 - Continue coordinating with federal agencies to identify opportunities for increased collaboration.
 - Identify and implement opportunities for increased collaboration with other states.
- **Topic: Support funding for exploration and development**
 - Recommend funding the geothermal exploration grant program established by Senate Bill 6039.
 - Identify federal funding opportunities and strategic partnerships.
 - Review various state and federal funding mechanisms to streamline the opportunities available for geothermal development.
- **Topic: Provide guidance and tools**
 - Develop a guidebook on regulatory and environmental review requirements for developing geothermal energy projects in Washington, from exploration through operations and project decommissioning.
 - Develop geothermal energy guidance, policy objectives, and model ordinances for local governments to incorporate into their comprehensive plans and development regulations.
- **Topic: Improve community and Tribal engagement and outreach**
 - Develop guidance and best practices to help developers and local governments effectively engage communities and Tribes in geothermal energy resource planning and project development.
- **Topic: Support use of community and Tribal benefit agreements**
 - Develop guidance on community and Tribal benefit agreements.
- **Topic: Promote Tribal geothermal energy exploration and development**
 - Consider options to support Tribal geothermal energy projects, including projects owned by or jointly developed with Tribes and private or public developers.

Geothermal Energy Collaborative Process

Legislative directive

The 2024 Washington Legislature passed [Senate Bill 6039](#) to promote the development of geothermal energy resources. Section 4 of the bill (excerpted below) directed the Department of Ecology (Ecology) to carry out a collaborative process to identify opportunities and risks associated with developing utility-scale geothermal energy resources in Washington for generating clean electricity.

Ecology is working closely with experts from the state departments of Commerce, Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources (DNR), and the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council. An update on the status of the collaborative process is due to the governor and Legislature by June 30, 2026, with the final report due June 30, 2027.

Sec. 4.

(1) The department of ecology, in consultation with the department of commerce, the department of natural resources, the department of fish and wildlife, and the department of archaeology and historic preservation, shall engage in a collaborative process to identify opportunities and risks associated with the development of geothermal resources in three locations with the highest geothermal potential in Washington. The department of natural resources must identify these three locations.

(2)(a) As part of the geothermal resources collaborative process, the department of ecology must engage in meaningful government-to-government consultation with potentially affected federally recognized Indian tribes by learning from each participating tribe about their communication protocols for consultation and must seek participation from the department of archaeology and historic preservation, other state agencies as appropriate, local governments, state research institutions, participants in Washington's electrical generation, transmission, and distribution sector, and environmental organizations. At the request of potentially affected federally recognized Indian tribes, the department of ecology may include additional participation with independent subject matter expertise.

(b) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department of ecology shall provide grants to potentially affected federally recognized Indian tribes to provide capacity and to support their evaluation of the cultural, natural resource, and other impacts of geothermal electricity development and to support their participation in the collaborative process established in this section.

(3) The geothermal resources collaborative process must identify and provide recommendations on, at a minimum, the following topics:

(a) The potential impacts of geothermal resources development, including impacts to:

(i) Rights, interests, and resources, including tribal cultural resources, of potentially affected federally recognized Indian tribes;

(ii) State or federal endangered species act listed species in Washington; and

(iii) Overburdened communities;

(b) The development of factors to guide the identification of preferable sites for the development of geothermal resources including, but not limited to, geologic suitability, proximity to electrical transmission and distribution infrastructure, and continuity between groundwater and surface water resources; and

(c) The capacity for geothermal resources in Washington to help the state meet its clean energy generation requirements and greenhouse gas emissions limits.

(4) The department of ecology must commence the geothermal resources collaborative process by November 30, 2024. The department of ecology must provide the appropriate committees of the legislature an update on the status of the collaborative process by June 30, 30 2026. The department of ecology must provide the appropriate committees of the legislature with a final report on the collaborative process by June 30, 2027.

Overview

This legislative update provides an overview of the collaborative process and engagement activities as of April 2026. We have also provided an introduction to current and potential geothermal technologies, and preliminary recommendations and themes from our initial engagement. It offers a first look at geothermal energy opportunities, risks, potential impacts, siting factors, and regulatory considerations in Washington gathered from workshops in fall 2025 and spring 2026. Ecology and DNR are conducting an additional technical analysis on technologies and potential impacts which will be available in fall 2026. We will share those results and gather additional input for the final legislative report due in 2027.

Throughout the collaborative process, Ecology is gathering input from state and federal agencies, local governments, Tribes, communities, industry, and other interested parties to inform the development of geothermal energy resources in Washington. The process is also helping identify potential impacts of geothermal development and key factors to consider when siting projects.

Our engagement efforts generated productive discussions statewide inducing feedback from communities, local governments, Tribes, industry representatives, and other interested parties. These conversations focused on three geothermal resource areas identified in previous Washington Geological Survey studies, housed within DNR, as having the highest potential: Mount Baker (Figure 1), Mount St. Helens, and the Wind River valley south of Mount St. Helens. To gather input, Ecology conducted community workshops, Tribal forums, and interagency meetings.



Figure 1. Participants talk with Ecology, DNR, and Commerce staff during the February 2026 Mount Baker workshop in Bellingham.

The feedback and information we gathered as of spring 2026 is included in this update. Additional engagement and synthesis will continue through the collaborative process, culminating in a final legislative report due June 30, 2027.

Scope

The geothermal energy collaborative process focuses on identifying opportunities and risks associated with developing utility-scale geothermal energy resources for generating electricity in Washington. Geothermal energy is a low-emission source of renewable energy that can provide continuous baseload power. The effort centers on understanding how geothermal resources may contribute to the state's long-term clean energy goals, including progress toward the state Climate Commitment and Clean Energy Transformation acts which commit the state to an electricity supply free of greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

Consistent with legislative direction, this work focuses specifically on electricity-producing geothermal applications and potential utility-scale development. Direct-use geothermal applications—such heating and cooling for buildings or industrial uses—are not a primary focus of this effort. However, this update provides high-level background information about these technologies to help contextualize geothermal energy within broader clean energy planning.

The scope includes identifying potential impacts associated with developing geothermal energy and siting and permitting criteria. Considerations include effects on Tribal rights and cultural resources, water quantity and quality, endangered and sensitive species, seismicity, and overburdened communities.

The collaborative process also examines factors that may influence site suitability, such as geologic characteristics and proximity to electrical transmission infrastructure.

To support this work, Ecology and partner state agencies, Tribes, communities, and interested parties participated in a coordinated set of engagement activities including community workshops, Tribal forums, and interagency meetings. The findings from this process inform this legislative update and will continue to shape the final legislative report due by June 30, 2027. These two reports provide a framework for understanding the opportunities, challenges, and considerations associated with utility-scale geothermal energy development in Washington.

While the legislation also authorizes grants to potentially affected federally recognized Tribes to support their participation in the collaborative process, funding was not appropriated for this purpose.

Other geothermal activities

Senate Bill 6039 directed the Washington Geological Survey to develop a public-facing subsurface database that includes all data relevant to the development of geothermal resources and to collect new data to fill critical data gaps. A new program is being formed to develop and maintain this comprehensive data. The legislation also directed DNR to review and update geothermal lease rates on State lands to align with rates in other western states. The lease rates were updated in 2025, as documented in [WAC 332-22-200 to 332-22-230](#).⁵

Lawmakers also authorized a cost-share grant program to allow Commerce to incentivize investment in drilling and early-phase geothermal investigations. However, the Legislature did not provide funding, so the program is not currently active.

Developing the legislative update

Ecology contracted with technical and facilitation consultants to support the collaborative process and associated research. Ross Strategic and Cascadia Consulting Group support facilitation of the process, including in-person and virtual engagement, Tribal forums, interagency coordination, and assistance in developing outreach and legislative reports. Hotrock Energy Research Organization provides technical research and analysis on emerging geothermal technologies, potential impacts, mitigation strategies, and facility siting considerations. Other research includes regulatory analysis across local, state and federal levels, as well as a gap analysis and lessons learned from other states and industries. In addition, DNR contracted with a consultant to conduct seismic hazard assessments for the three geothermal focus areas of this effort.

Technical research and seismic hazard assessment results are expected in the summer of 2026. We will share the results in the fall of 2026 and collect additional feedback and input to include in the final legislative report due in June 2027.

Geothermal energy in Washington

Geothermal energy refers to heat stored beneath the Earth's surface that can be used for heating, cooling, generating electricity, and industrial and agricultural purposes.

⁵ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=332-22>

Low- and moderate-temperature geothermal resources (those below 194°F and up to 302°F) can be used for heating and cooling residential and commercial dwellings and structures as well as agriculture and industrial purposes.

Moderate- to high-temperature resources (above 302°F) can be used to generate electricity and are the focus of the geothermal collaborative process.

Geothermal energy can help Washington meet its clean energy goals and utilities have expressed interest in this energy resource due to its ability to provide constant baseload power. Although Washington has geothermal potential and there is interest in exploring and developing this resource, there are currently no specific utility-scale projects for electrical generation under consideration.

The Washington Geothermal Experience

The Washington Geological Survey developed an [interactive webpage](#) to provide an overview of the status of geothermal technologies, research, and use in Washington.

Geothermal and Washington's energy strategy

Geothermal energy is being studied because it could help the state meet its clean energy goals under the state Climate Commitment and Clean Energy Transformation acts and provide reliable power. Most importantly, geothermal energy can serve as a “always on” or baseload power source, critical for maintaining the reliability of the electric grid. It supports the integration of intermittent renewable resources such as wind and solar which cannot operate continuously. Washington's broader framework for energy planning increasingly recognizes the potential value of geothermal resources. Continued research, updated resource mapping, and coordination with utilities, research partners, Tribes, community members, and state agencies will help determine the long-term contribution of geothermal to a decarbonized and resilient energy system.

The [2021 Washington State Energy Strategy](#)⁶ recognized geothermal energy as a promising emerging resource and encouraged research, development, demonstration projects, and collaboration between state agencies, research universities, national laboratories, federal partners, and private-sector innovators. The strategy also identified ground-source heat pumps as a key zero-emission heating and cooling option for buildings and called for support to accelerate their deployment for residential and commercial customers.^{7,8}

⁶ <https://deptoocommerce.box.com/s/zsbjvf0nato9q7dk3t7jih0vjbd4iqof>

⁷ Washington State Department of Commerce. (2020, December). Washington 2021 State Energy Strategy. <https://deptoocommerce.app.box.com/s/t4qd4zhohzb5kmp0rz5yb4c5h248e67e>

⁸ Washington State Department of Commerce. (2020, December 31). Appendix D - Heat Pumps. Washington 2021 State Energy Strategy. <https://deptoocommerce.app.box.com/s/0jktbcn0f43whgc9n67eqwh0agoawciq/file/1669195945662>

The [2024 Biennial Energy Report](#)⁹ highlighted opportunities to further evaluate geothermal electricity production, advance networked geothermal systems for community-scale heating and cooling and support updated resource assessments. The report also supported the evaluation of emerging technologies—such as enhanced and advanced geothermal systems—that are in the process of reaching early commercialization stages.¹⁰

Across the nation, geothermal development has been increasing. In 2025, the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Geothermal and the National Lab of the Rockies updated its market assessment of the U.S. geothermal market¹¹. Growth is being driven by advancements in technologies, state energy policies, and demand for constantly available energy sources.

There are 99 existing geothermal power plants in the western United States with a majority of facilities in California and Nevada. From 2021 through 2025, there were 26 agreements between utilities or companies to purchase electrical power from geothermal projects. Approximately 60% of those agreements were for emerging geothermal technologies, mostly enhanced geothermal systems.

As utilities strive to meet Washington’s clean energy requirements, geothermal resources can play a growing role in meeting customer’s power needs. These resources provide valuable baseload power generation capacity and electrical grid reliability that compliments intermittent renewable energy sources like solar and wind. Washington utilities have not historically incorporated geothermal into their resource plans due to limited data regarding in-state potential and project economics. However, updated geological assessments, federal pilot projects, and developing regional markets may influence future planning cycles.

Additional geothermal applications in Washington

While the collaborative process focuses on geothermal energy for electricity production, the state also supports ground-source heat pumps and direct-use geothermal energy applications.

Ground-source heat pumps use the stable temperatures of underground soil, rock, or groundwater to heat and cool buildings. In winter, they draw heat from the ground and transfer it indoors. During the summer, they move excess indoor heat back into the ground. Because the ground maintains a relatively constant annual temperature, ground-source heat pumps operate more efficiently than conventional heating and cooling technologies such as natural gas or electric heating.

⁹ <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/93of6sfoeo6eh3kvrflmi9xj81tv2f8v>

¹⁰ Washington State Department of Commerce. (2025, April 4). 2024 Biennial Energy Report. <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/93of6sfoeo6eh3kvrflmi9xj81tv2f8v>

¹¹ National Laboratory of the Rockies. (2025). 2025 U.S. Geothermal Market Report. <https://docs.nrel.gov/docs/fy26osti/91898.pdf>.

Low to moderate temperature systems can also be used for agricultural and industrial purposes such as food dehydration, greenhouse heating, spa and bathing facilities, and snow- and ice-melting infrastructure.¹²

These systems operate at multiple scales. Residential-scale heat pumps typically provide heating and cooling to one building, including single-family and multi-family buildings. District-scale heat pumps operate at a larger scale to provide heating or cooling for corporate offices, university campuses, large data centers, or even neighborhoods and towns.

Several direct-use applications are underway in Washington. For example, Seattle Public Schools is replacing gas-fired boiler systems with geothermal heat pumps during school remodels and replacements.¹³ The Goldendale hospital is installing a geothermal heat pump system with \$3 million in support from the Washington Clean Energy Fund. Central Washington University is building the GeoEco Center which will use a ground-source heat pump system to heat and cool approximately 500,000 square feet of campus facilities.¹⁴ Through [Commerce grant programs](#),¹⁵ thermal energy networks are also under development at Bellingham Technical College¹⁶ and the city of Vancouver where the network will serve city hall and other municipal buildings.¹⁷

Geothermal research in Washington and Senate Bill 6039

Studies in Washington regarding the potential application of geothermal energy started in the early 1970s. These studies used targeted drilling of exploratory wells to measure temperature profiles based on depth to develop a geothermal gradient. In 2009, the U.S. Department of Energy Department provided funding to support additional data collection. DNR used the funds to conduct drilling to measure geothermal gradients around the state. They also developed a statewide campaign to collect samples and gather data about thermal and mineral springs. In 2014, DNR launched a suite of geospatial layers for state geothermal resources on its [Washington Geologic Information Portal](#).¹⁸ This included data for geothermal gradients, thermal and mineral springs, geothermal system locations, drilling permit locations, and maps of geothermal potential and favorability. These statewide datasets represent the most

¹² U.S. Department of Energy. (2016, November 15). Heat from Beneath the Ground – Working to Advance Deep Direct-Use Geothermal. U.S. Department of Energy. <https://www.energy.gov/hgeo/geothermal/articles/heat-beneath-ground-working-advance-deep-direct-use-geothermal>

¹³ U.S. Department of Energy. (n.d.). Geothermal Heat Pump Case Study: Seattle Public Schools. <https://www.energy.gov/hgeo/geothermal/geothermal-heat-pump-case-study-seattle-public-schools>

¹⁴ Eavor. (2025, April 14). Technology: Closed-Loop Geothermal Technology for a 24/7 Carbon-free and Secure Energy Future. Eavor. <https://eavor.com/technology/>

¹⁵ <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/epic/clean-energy-grants/>

¹⁶ Cascadia Daily News. March 4, 2026. Flooded coal mine under Bellingham could become heat source for college. <https://www.cascadiadaily.com/2026/mar/04/flooded-coal-mine-under-bellingham-could-become-heat-source-for-college/>

¹⁷ Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission. June 5, 2025. UG-250458: Petition for the Intent to Deploy a Thermal Energy Network Pilot Project, Pursuant to RCW 80.28.460(2)(a). <https://www.utc.wa.gov/casedocket/2025/250458>

¹⁸ <https://dnr.wa.gov/washington-geological-survey/publications-and-data/geologic-information-portal>

comprehensive effort to map Washington’s potential geothermal resources and favorability models.¹⁹ This modeling identified several areas of high or elevated geothermal favorability in the Cascade Mountains, including the east side of Mount Baker, the areas surrounding Mount St. Helens, the Wind River valley, and the Columbia Basin.

From 2015 through 2019, the U.S. Department of Energy funded further research by DNR to refine geothermal potential near Mount Baker, Mount St. Helens, and the Wind River valley. Activities included drilling boreholes, geologic mapping, and geophysical exploration. The results were incorporated into the existing models to more precisely delineate the extent and scale of subsurface heat in these three favorable areas.

From 2019 through 2021, DNR conducted a play-fairway study of the three focus areas. A play-fairway study is a method of systematically evaluating potential locations for hydrothermal resources to evaluate the likelihood of a combination of unique geophysical, geologic, structural, or stratigraphic elements (the “play”) within a region to determine areas (“fairways”) where geothermal resources are projected to exist. The play-fairway study of the three focus areas incorporated targeted drilling, terrain geophysics, and geologic mapping with a detailed analysis of fault systems to better characterize geothermal resources.²⁰ The focus areas were further refined by factoring in land availability and lease potential with proximity to transmission infrastructure.

Senate Bill 6039 adopted in 2024, builds on this body of work by directing further assessment of Washington’s geothermal potential and supporting additional data collection. DNR is using state funding to collect additional data and analysis and update the thermal and mineral spring database. The database will include a revised data structure, new sampling, and additional analysis to better understand groundwater age, interactions with bedrock, and reservoir temperatures. Legacy and new groundwater chemistry data will enable DNR to publish detailed analyses and reports in 2027. A contractor, Lettis Consultants International, is also performing induced seismic hazard assessments for the three focus areas. These reports will also be published in 2027.

Together, decades of geological research, recent targeted exploration efforts, and the new state policy direction have positioned Washington to be able to more fully evaluate the role geothermal energy could play in meeting the state’s long-term clean-energy, reliability, and community-resilience goals. This work establishes the technical basis for this collaborative process and the state’s broader geothermal assessment effort.

¹⁹ Boschmann, D. E.; Czajkowski, J. L.; Bowman, J. D., 2014, Geothermal favorability model of Washington State: Washington Division of Geology and Earth Resources Open File Report 2014-02, 1 plate, scale 1:900,000, 26 p. https://dnr.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/ger_ofr2014-02_geothermal_favorability.pdf

²⁰ Washington Geological Survey. (2021, September 30). Geothermal Play-Fairway Analysis of Washington State Prospects: Final Report. <https://www.osti.gov/biblio/1823116/>

Geothermal technologies

The collaborative process examines three types of geothermal technologies for electricity generation: conventional geothermal and new technologies called enhanced and advanced geothermal systems (Figure 2). All use steam to turn large turbines that generate electricity. The suitability of each geothermal technology depends on local geology and hydrology, particularly how temperatures increase with depth and how easily fluids can circulate through rock formations.²¹

The collaborative process considers the full lifecycle of geothermal power plant development, including exploration, construction, operations, and decommissioning. It also evaluates the above- and belowground infrastructure needed, such as access roads and electrical transmission connections.

Ecology is researching these technologies and the exploration, construction, and operational requirements. Additional technical details and considerations for the collaborative process will be shared during future workshops in the fall of 2026.

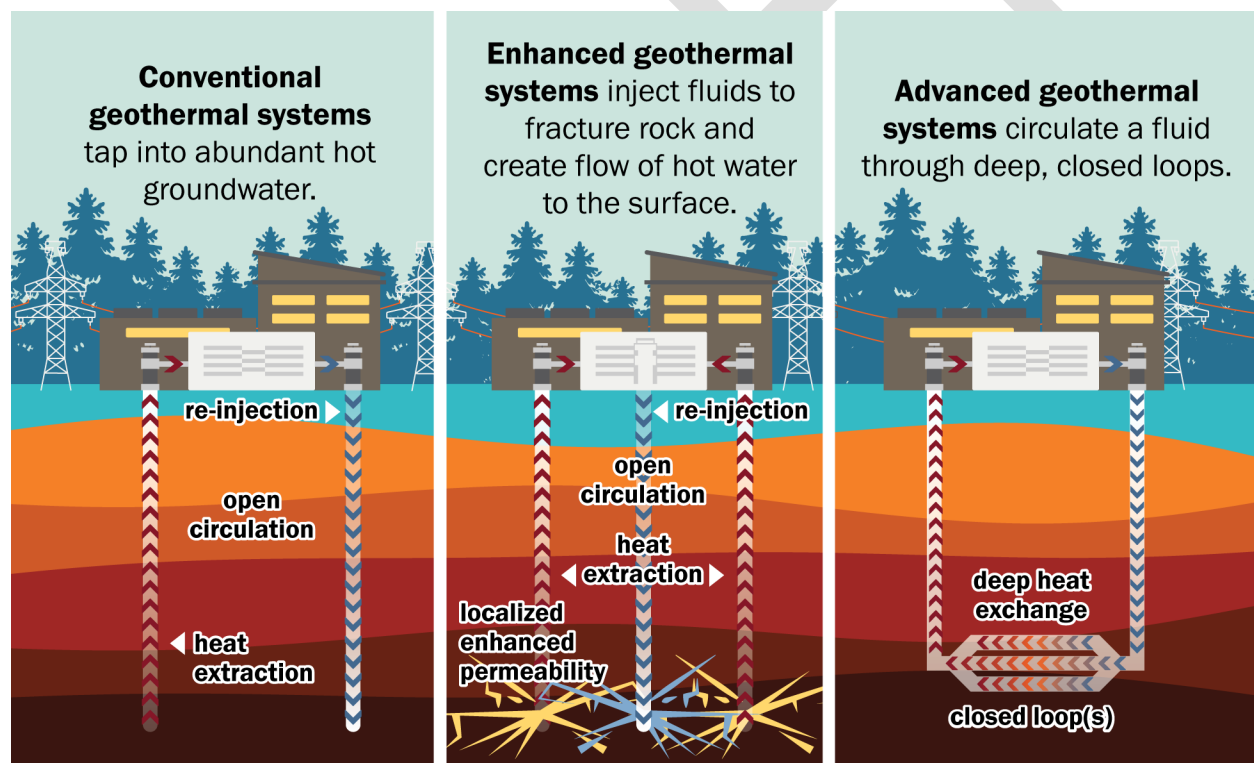


Figure 2. Three types of geothermal energy technologies.

Conventional geothermal systems

Conventional geothermal systems rely on naturally occurring underground conditions to generate power including high temperatures at a relatively shallow depth, sufficient fluid or

²¹ Washington State Department of Natural Resources. (n.d.). Geothermal Resources in Washington State. Retrieved March 6, 2026, from https://dnr.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/ger_fs_geothermal_resources.pdf.

steam to carry heat to the surface, and subsurface conditions allowing fluid or steam to flow freely.

In these systems, hot groundwater or steam rises to the surface and drives turbines to generate electricity. After the heat is extracted, the cooled geothermal fluid is reinjected back into the reservoir to maintain pressure and support long-term sustainability.

The Geysers, located in northern California, is the largest complex of conventional geothermal power plants in the world, producing approximately 725 megawatts of electricity—enough to power a city the size of San Francisco.²²

Enhanced geothermal systems

Enhanced geothermal systems are designed for locations where underground heat exists but natural fluid circulation is limited. In these systems, deep wells are drilled into “dry” hot rock formations and water injected under pressure to create fractures, or “break” the rock, a method called hydraulic fracturing. These fractures allow water to circulate through the rock, producing fluid or steam that can be brought to the surface to generate electricity.

Hydraulic fracturing has been used in oil and gas development for decades but its adaptation to geothermal applications is relatively new. The U.S. Energy Department funded several large-scale demonstration projects, including the Frontier Observatory for Research in Geothermal Energy, or FORGE project, in Utah.²³ In 2023, the first enhanced geothermal project in the United States to deliver electricity to the grid began operating in Nevada.²⁴ Enhanced geothermal systems are extensively studied and monitored to reduce risks, including induced seismicity and impacts on aquifer systems.

Advanced geothermal systems

Advanced geothermal systems, including what are commonly referred to as “closed-loop geothermal systems,” are another emerging technology used when conventional geothermal systems are not feasible.

Unlike enhanced systems, closed-loop systems do not rely on underground fractures or fluid movement in the surrounding rock. Instead, they act like radiators, circulating fluids through sealed underground pipes that absorb heat from the surrounding rock and bring it to the surface for power production.²⁵ In these closed loops, a fluid with a boiling point lower than water is contained within the pipes and does not contact the surrounding rock.

²² Calpine. (n.d.) About the Geysers. Retrieved March 23, 2026, from <https://geysers.com/about/>

²³ U.S. Department of Energy. (n.d.). Enhanced Geothermal Systems Demonstration Projects. U.S. Department of Energy. <https://www.energy.gov/hgeo/geothermal/enhanced-geothermal-systems-demonstration-projects>

²⁴ Gallucci, M. (2023, November 28). America’s first “enhanced” geothermal plant just got up and running. Canary Media. <https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/geothermal/americas-first-enhanced-geothermal-plant-just-got-up-and-running#:~:text=At%20the%20geothermal%20site,%20two,percent%20drop%20from%20today%27s%20prices>

²⁵ U.S. Department of Energy. (n.d.). Geothermal Electricity Generation. U.S. Department of Energy. <https://www.energy.gov/hgeo/geothermal/geothermal-electricity-generation>

The first commercial advanced geothermal system, Eavor-Loop in southern Germany, began operations in late 2025.²⁶

Collaborative process focus areas

While the collaborative process includes statewide considerations, initial focus is on the three areas identified as having high geothermal potential (Figure 3). The unique communities, land uses, and economic histories within each focus area shape how geothermal development may be considered locally. Understanding these regional characteristics helps inform how engagement activities are designed and who may be most affected by potential geothermal development.

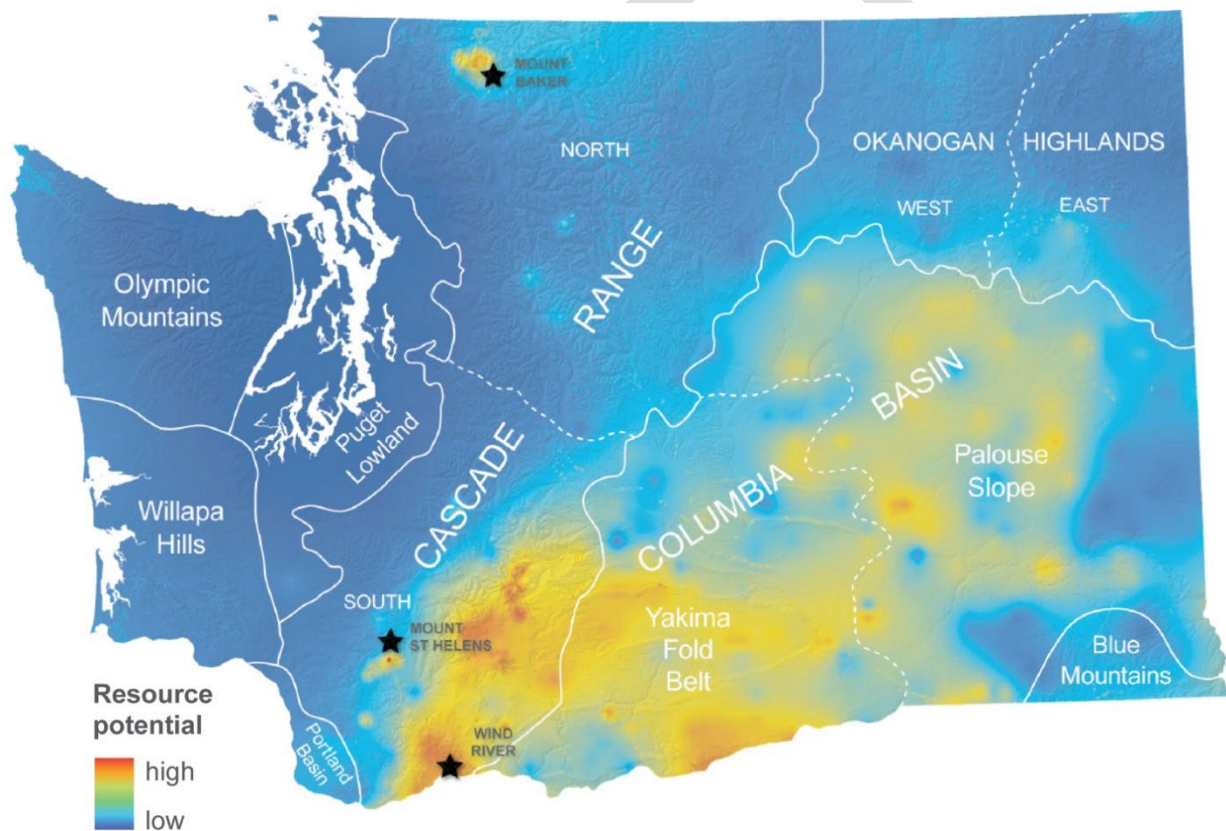


Figure 3. Geothermal energy resource focus areas²⁷

The following regional profiles summarize key geographic, community, and geothermal characteristics and will be updated as additional insights emerge.

²⁶ Power. (2026, January 8). Eavor's first-of-its kind closed-loop geothermal project produces grid power in Germany. <https://www.powermag.com/eavors-first-of-its-kind-closed-loop-geothermal-project-produces-grid-power-in-germany/>

²⁷ Boschmann, D., et al. (July 2014). Geothermal Favorability Model of Washington State. Open File Report 2014-02. https://www.dnr.wa.gov/publications/ger_ofr2014-02_geothermal_favorability.pdf

Mount Baker area

Community and landscape context

The Mount Baker focus area is located on the southeast side of Mount Baker and northwest of Baker Lake on federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service within the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (Figure 4).²⁸ The area is accessed from the south via State Route 20 to Baker Lake Road and Forest Road 11. It covers approximately 100 square miles and lies primarily in Whatcom County, adjacent to the Skagit County border. The area is known for its volcanic features, forests, waterways, abundant wildlife, and deep cultural significance to the Tribal Nations who have lived in present-day Whatcom and Skagit counties since time immemorial.²⁹

Baker Hot Springs, Pacific Northwest Trail, and several recreation trails and trailheads are located within the focus area and on nearby forest lands. The region supports important salmon fisheries and historical Tribal fishing areas such as Baker Lake and the recently rebounding Baker River sockeye, and sustains a strong recreation economy centered on hiking, camping, boating, and winter sports.³⁰

Surrounding communities include rural towns such as Concrete in Skagit County and Glacier in Whatcom County as well as regional urban centers such as Mount Vernon and Bellingham. These communities reflect a mix of agricultural, recreation-based, and small-town identities.

²⁸ U.S. Forest Service and U.S. National Park Service. (n.d.). North Cascades and Mt. Baker Visitor Information Guide. Retrieved from https://ncascades.org/discover/north-cascades-ecosystem/files/Visitor-Information-Guide-Nov-09_web.pdf

²⁹ Vance-Sherman, A. (2022). Whatcom County profile. Washington State, Employment Security Department. Washington State Employment Security Department. Retrieved from <https://esd.wa.gov/media/pdf/444/whatcom20county20profile202022pdf/download?inline>

³⁰ Pailthorp, B. (2025). Upper Skagit Indian Tribe celebrates huge rebound of Baker River sockeye. Retrieved from KNKX Public Radio: <https://www.knkx.org/environment/2025-10-16/upper-skagit-indian-tribe-baker-river-sockeye-puget-sound-energy>

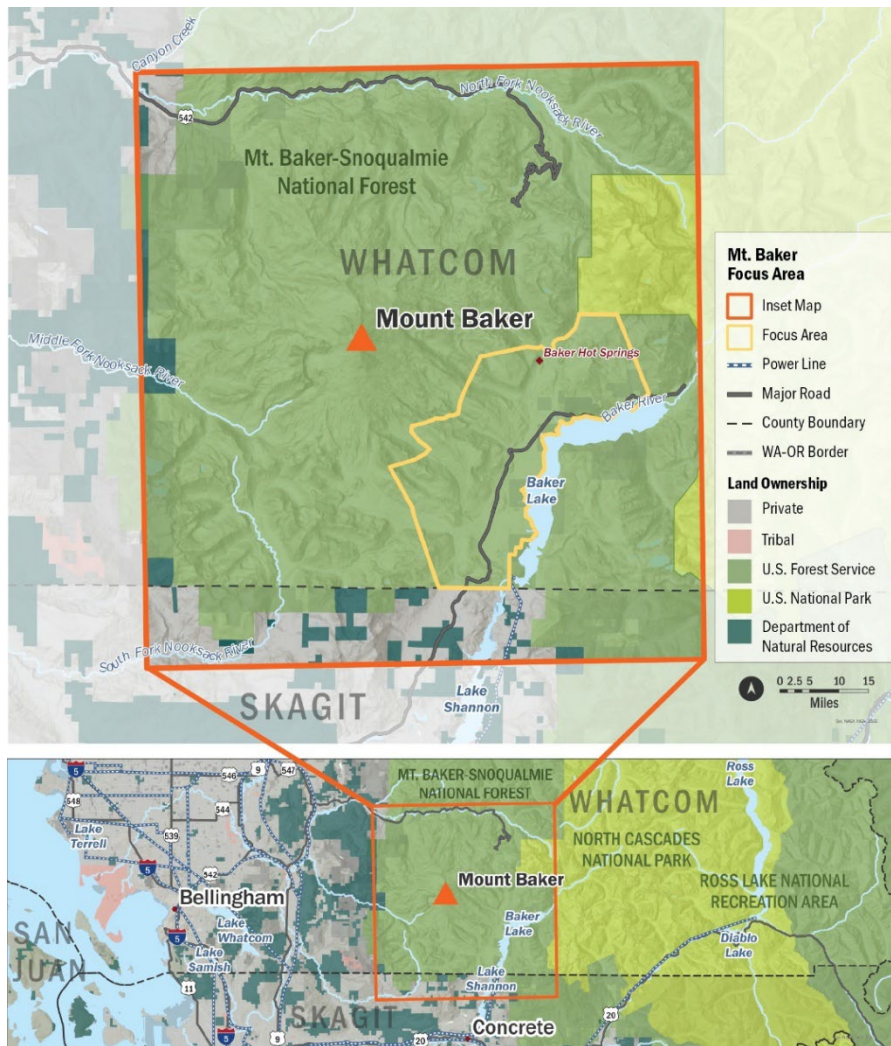


Figure 4. Map of the Mount Baker focus area

Geothermal considerations

Mount Baker sits in one of Washington's dynamic volcanic regions. Heat flow, recent volcanic activity, and historical hydrothermal features indicate strong geothermal potential. Two geothermal wells have been drilled in the focus area and data collected as part of previous studies by DNR. Field and geophysical mapping revealed a network of faults, with a particularly high fault density near Baker Hot Springs. Some modeling for subsurface flow was also completed but subsurface data remains limited. Improved geological and geophysical mapping is needed to reduce uncertainty in subsurface conditions and geothermal potential.

The Legislature recently allocated \$500,000 to support the Nooksack Indian Tribe, in partnership with the Whatcom County Public Utility District, in conducting a pre-feasibility

study of the geothermal potential of the Mount Baker (Kweq' Smánit) region.³¹ That recently completed study includes a site assessment and preliminary feasibility analysis, as well as further site exploration recommendations to support a possible future geothermal project plan.

The U.S. Forest Service also had active lease lands in the area between 2014 and 2019, but no projects were developed. They are currently evaluating nominated lease parcels that overlap with and extend beyond past lease areas.³²

Mount St. Helens area

Community and landscape context

The Mount St. Helens focus area is in southwestern Washington and comprises two areas—one on the north side of the mountain and the other on the south side. The northern focus area covers approximately 75 square miles in Cowlitz and Skamania counties, and the southern focus area covers approximately 20 square miles in Skamania County (Figure 5). The focus area does not include the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument area. Land ownership is primarily private timber land. The area is accessed from the northwest on State Route 504 or the Spirit Lake Highway and from the southwest by Lewis River Road and Forest Road 90. The focus areas and surrounding lands include multiple streams and lakes, including Coldwater Lake and Swift Reservoir. Nearby public lands offer multiple recreation opportunities including hiking, camping, hunting, wildlife viewing, and scenic areas.

Mount St. Helens (lawilátla, listed as Lawetlat'la) also holds deep cultural importance to multiple Tribes and was listed on the Washington State Register of Historic Places and National Register of Historic Places as a Traditional Cultural Property in 2013.³³ When we met with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe they specifically noted the importance of Mount St. Helens. The mountain is a place of exceptional spiritual power, reflects important traditional cultural beliefs rooted in Tribal history, and it is important in maintaining the cultural continuity of the Tribal communities that value the place. The Traditional Cultural Property boundary includes the area of the mountain above the tree line, which occurs at an elevation of approximately 4,000 feet above sea level. The Loowit Trail #216, which encircles the mountain, occurs at roughly this elevation and serves as the tangible fixed boundary for the property.³⁴

³¹ Hotrock Energy Research Organization. (2025, December). Mt. Baker/Kweq' Smánit Region Prefeasibility Geothermal Resource Assessment Final Report. https://www.pudwhatcom.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/MtBakerGeoPrefeasibility_Final_Report_12_2025.pdf

³² U.S. Forest Service. (n.d.). 2025 Mt. Baker Geothermal Consent to Lease. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/mbs/projects/68702>

³³ McClure, R., J. Hand and A. Burke. (2012). National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Lawetlat'la. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Program. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/AssetDetail/42a51632-8b57-4d1c-aaed-48ad85765864>

³⁴ McClure, R., and N. Reynolds. (2015). Making the List: Mount St. Helens As a Traditional Cultural Property, A Case Study in Tribal/Government Cooperation. Journal of Northwest Anthropology, Volume 49, No. 2. https://kboo.fm/sites/default/files/mcclure-reynolds_jona_final.pdf.

The focus area lies within rural, forested landscapes whose communities have been shaped by timber, manufacturing, and transportation-based economies. Surrounding communities include Castle Rock, Cougar, St. Helens, and Woodland.

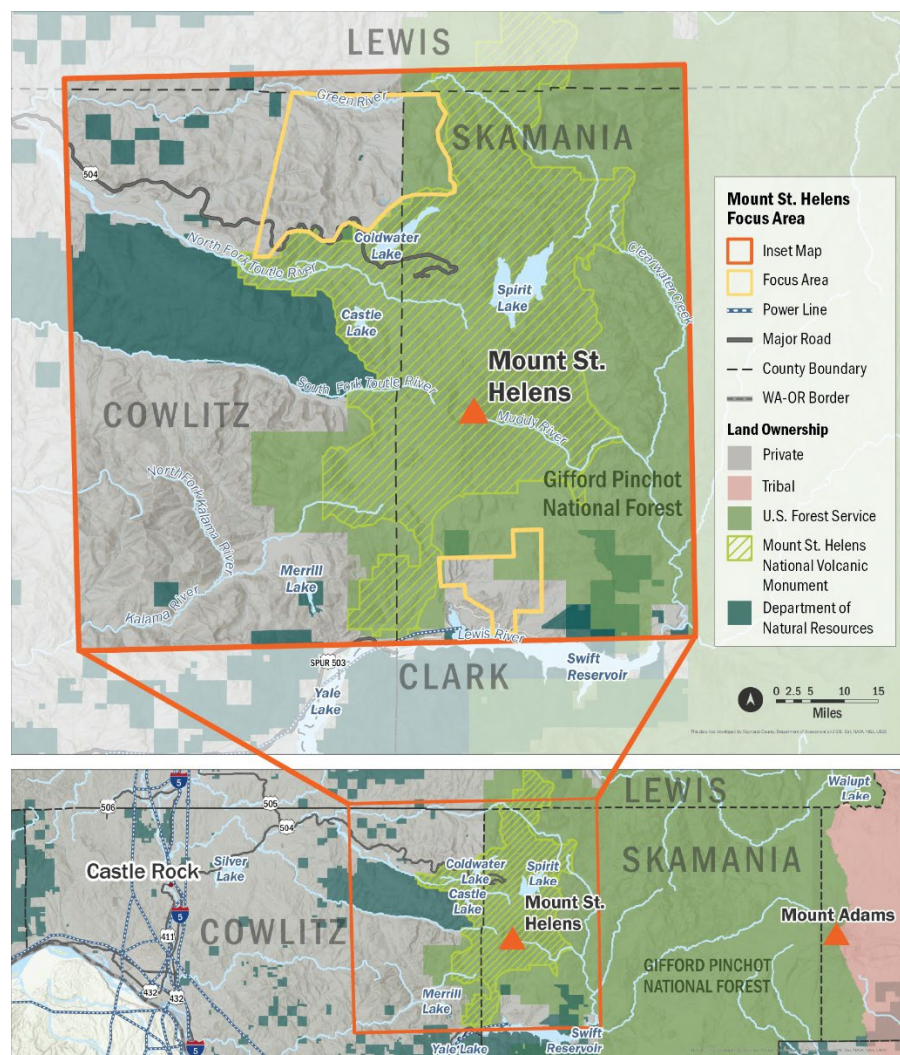


Figure 5. Map of Mount St. Helens focus area

Geothermal considerations

Mount St. Helens is a well-studied volcanic system and with clear signs of geothermal activity. Decades of scientific monitoring, primarily by the U.S. Geological Survey, provide insight into its structure and composition of the volcanic system, including a large body of data from seismometers, ground deformation sensors, volcanic gas detectors, and chemistry of thermal springs associated with adjacent volcanic activity. While important, these data focus on volcanic activity rather than geothermal energy and largely come from areas within the national monument. DNR has collected chemistry data from springs in the region that focuses on potential geothermal resources. They also state agency collected geothermal data, conducted mapping and surveys, and drilled a borehole on Elk Ridge north of Mount St. Helens as part of the geothermal play fairway investigation. This body of work suggests some potential of

geothermal resources to the north and south of Mount St. Helens but additional data gathering and studies are needed.

Wind River valley area

Community and landscape context

The Wind River valley focus area is in Skamania County in southwestern Washington. The area covers approximately 160 square miles and includes a mix of state, federal, and private lands, with the northern portion located within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest with the southern portion under state and private ownership (Figure 6). The Wind River corridor is widely recognized for its scenic and ecological value, including its designation as a wild steelhead river and its consideration for scenic river status in its lower reaches.³⁵ The area also encompasses the U.S. Forest Services' Wind River Historic District, a historic administrative and research district with early-20th-century ranger, nursery, and experiment station facilities as well as the Pacific Northwest's oldest arboretum, contributing to its cultural and environmental significance.³⁶ A portion of this focus area is in the [Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area](#).³⁷ There are also two Bonneville Power Administration electrical transmission lines running east to west along the Columbia River.

The focus area is within a largely rural landscape shaped by forestry, river-based transportation, and recreation tied to the Columbia River Gorge and surrounding forests. Nearby communities include Carson and the unincorporated communities of Hemlock, Home Valley, Stabler, and Trout Lake, which provide limited local services and access points for recreation, forest management, and travel through the valley. The region reflects a mix of long-established rural settlements, small tourism-centered communities, and county-level economies influenced by government employment, accommodation, food services, and manufacturing.³⁸

³⁵ Historic Wind River. (n.d.). History and restoration efforts at Historic Wind River. Retrieved from Historic Wind River: <https://www.windriverwa.org/the-history-of-skamania-county/>

³⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. (n.d.). Wind River Historic District. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/giffordpinchot/recreation/wind-river-historic-district>

³⁷ <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/columbiarivergorge>

³⁸ Bailey, S. (2022). Skamania County profile. Washington State Employment Security Department. Retrieved from <https://esd.wa.gov/media/pdf/892/skamania20county20profile202022pdf/download?inline>

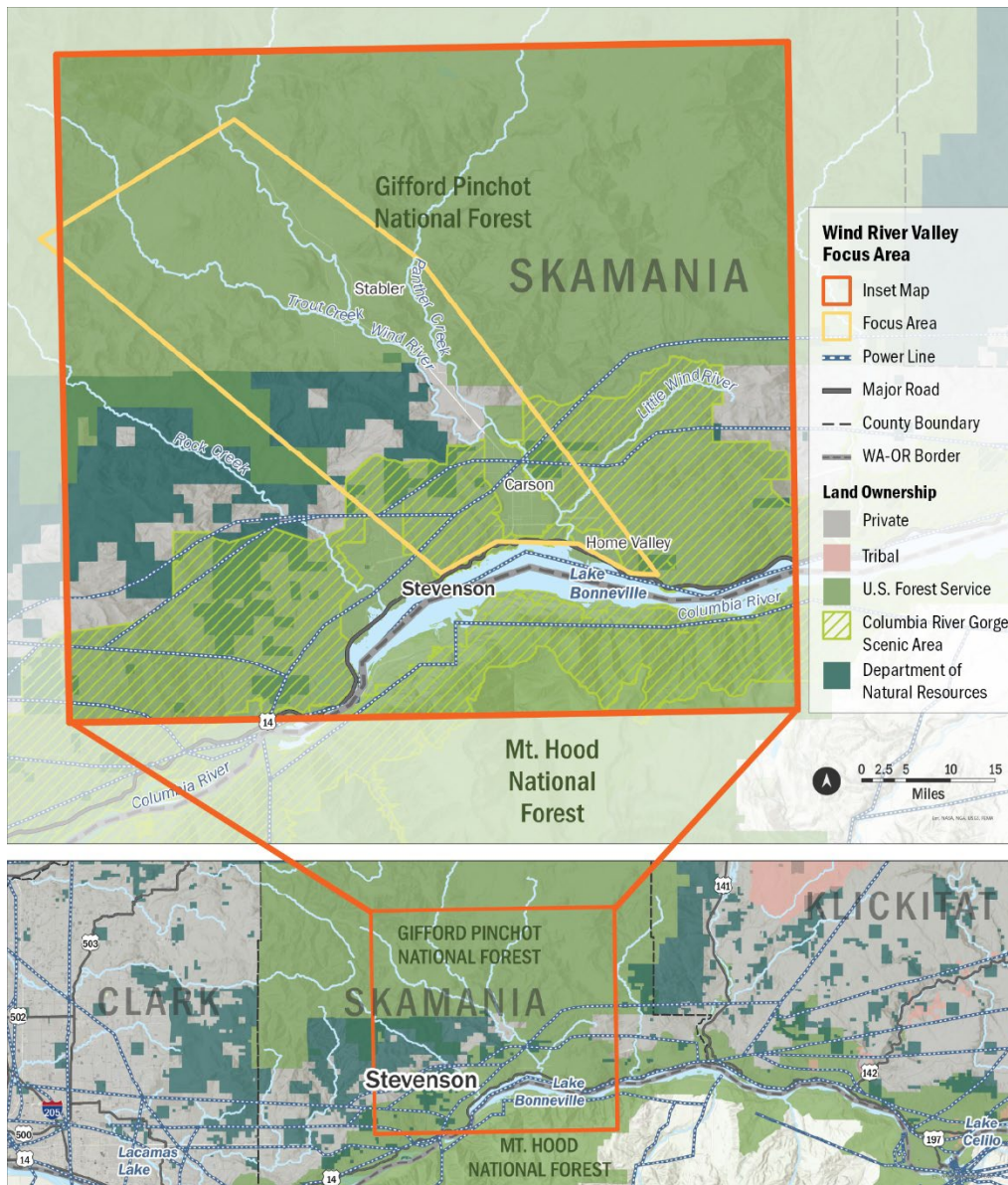


Figure 6. Map of Wind River valley focus area

Geothermal considerations

The Wind River valley area represents a distinct geothermal setting outside of major volcanic centers. It offers an opportunity to evaluate geothermal systems that are influenced by bedrock faults and fractures. The Washington Geologic Survey identified this corridor as an important place to improve understanding of subsurface temperature gradients, permeability, and fault-controlled groundwater flow. These are areas where current data are limited but essential for understanding Washington's broader geothermal potential.

Engagement plan overview

This collaborative process is grounded in early, meaningful, and ongoing engagement with Tribes, local governments, community-based organizations, utilities, industry partners, environmental groups, and the public.

Throughout the process timeline (Figure 7), Ecology is implementing various outreach strategies, with particular focus on the three focus areas. Input gathered through these activities helps ensure community and Tribal perspectives as well as local context informs this legislative update and the final recommendations to be shared in 2027. The engagement activities are sequenced in phases and supported by feedback loops so that input gathered early informs subsequent discussions.



Figure 7. High-level timeline of the engagement activities

Engagement goals and methods

New technologies have increased the potential for geothermal development in Washington. Most people are unfamiliar with these emerging technologies or how they might be affected. The collaborative process is designed to provide clear and accessible information about the types of technologies and opportunities and risks associated with developing geothermal energy. Ecology seeks to understand public and Tribal concerns, perspectives, and recommendations, recognizing that priorities may vary across geographies. We are providing multiple ways to support meaningful participation, particularly among overburdened, vulnerable, and historically underserved populations, through accessible and transparent engagement opportunities.

We have conducted meetings, virtual and in-person community workshops, Tribal forums, and public comment periods. We also maintain a [collaborative process website](#)³⁹ to share information and updates. Other communication methods include blogs and social media posts, radio ads, email and newsletter updates, and presentations to industry groups and organizations.

Tribal engagement and consultation

Ecology invites early, meaningful, and ongoing engagement and consultation with federally recognized Tribes. Engagement began in August 2025 and will continue throughout the process with information sharing and opportunities for input at each phase. Ecology shared a draft Tribal Engagement and Consultation plan with information and options for the collaborative process with Tribes for review and feedback. Senate Bill 6039 requires the process identify and provide recommendations regarding the rights, interests, and resources, including cultural resources, of potentially affected federally recognized Tribes.

The collaborative process provides multiple options for Tribes to share information and perspectives about developing geothermal energy. This includes government-to-government consultation, community workshops, Tribal forums, draft legislative update and report reviews, and updates at Tribal meetings and conferences. The plan identifies options for engagement and consultation regarding potential impacts of geothermal energy development on Tribal Treaty rights, interests, and resources, including cultural and archaeological sites, sacred sites, fisheries, and other rights reserved or protected by federal treaty, statute, or executive order. Tribes may also provide comment letters to include as an appendix to the legislative update or final report.

Engagement to date

Ecology began the geothermal energy collaborative process in November 2024. Agencies meet monthly to share information and plan the collaborative process. Early engagement with interested parties and Tribes began in 2025 and the agencies held several public informational webinars and a Tribal forum. Community and Tribal engagement activities continue into 2026. The sections below provide an overview of the activities that have been implemented as of spring 2026. *Appendix A. Interested Parties and Tribes Engaged* includes a list of interested parties and Tribes engaged as of spring 2026.

Communities and interested parties

Throughout 2025, Ecology conducted 12 targeted outreach meetings with interested parties, including community-based organizations, public utility districts, utilities, local jurisdictions, and state and federal agencies in the Mount Baker, Mount St. Helens, and Wind River valley regions.

In August 2025, Ecology held a virtual information webinar describing the collaborative process, geothermal technologies, opportunities and risks, and opportunities for input. There were 89 attendees representing varying interests and geographies across the state. A recording of that

³⁹ <https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/sepa/clean-energy/geothermal>

webinar is available on the collaborative process website. In November 2025, Ecology and DNR held two virtual public workshops to provide background information and solicit input on opportunities and risks for geothermal development. Attendees included representatives from 10 Tribes and approximately 90 interested parties from utilities, industry, organizations, individuals, academia, and federal, state, and local agencies. The presentation and summary of the input is posted on Ecology's website.

In early 2026, the consultants held seven interviews with community-based organizations, public utility districts, and local jurisdictions to help develop engagement options that would best suit the community needs.

In February and March 2026, we held three in-person community workshops in the Mount Baker area, Mount St. Helens area, and Wind River valley area (Figure 8). At each event, we shared information, answered questions, and gathered input related to geothermal energy exploration. We provided an overview of geothermal energy, background on the collaborative process, how the focus areas were determined, and awareness of other geothermal planning in the areas. The in-person workshops help ensure future steps are informed by local knowledge and community values.

In March 2026, Ecology and DNR hosted a statewide virtual workshop to provide background information, share updates and key themes to date from the collaborative process, as well as to collect feedback. The virtual statewide workshop provided the opportunity to hear from individuals and organizations outside of the three geographic focus areas, as well as individuals and organizations who were unable to attend the in-person workshops. This workshop included facilitated small-group breakout discussions, participants shared feedback on opportunities and risks related to geothermal development and geographic considerations beyond the three focus areas.

To advertise the workshops, we posted a blog which was distributed to media outlets across the state. We also placed notices in local newspapers, bought radio ads for English and Spanish stations, made social media posts and distributed notices to different email lists and Ecology newsletters. There was also an online comment form for written feedback. We provided a Spanish interpreter at the workshops, and all outreach materials were translated into Spanish.

Participants included community members, Tribal staff, environmental organizations, academia, utilities and utility associations, energy project developers, community land trusts, forest landowners, and local, state, and federal agencies.

Ecology also engaged utilities and energy developers to better understand their siting and financing considerations and market interest in geothermal resources. These discussions provided insight into project sequencing, regulatory and leasing constraints, technology pathways, and community engagement considerations from entities directly involved in or evaluating geothermal development.



Figure 8. March 2026 Wind River valley area workshop at the Stevenson Community Library in Stevenson

Tribal engagement

In September 2025, Ecology shared a draft Tribal Engagement and Consultation Plan with Tribes for their review and offered consultation. The Yakama Nation provided comments on the draft plan. Multiple Tribes attended the August 2025 virtual webinar. Ecology met with the Cowlitz Tribe to provide an overview of the process, made a presentation at the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians energy conference and extended invitations to meet to both the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. In November 2025, we offered a virtual Tribal-only forum to provide information about the process and present the draft Tribal Engagement and Consultation Plan. Tribes also attended the virtual public workshops in November 2025.

In early 2026, Ecology shared a draft outline of this legislative update with Tribes for input and offered in-person meetings for Tribes in the focus areas as well as virtual meetings for any interested Tribe. Ecology met with staff from the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community; the Tribe shared comments they sent to the U.S. Forest Service in October 2025 on the Mount Baker federal geothermal consent to lease process. Staff from the Nooksack Indian Tribe and the Yakama Nation attended the in-person community workshops. The Yakama Nation also

submitted a comment letter with feedback on the legislative update outline and comments on the collaborative process. For the full list of Tribes engaged to date, see *Appendix A. Interested Parties and Tribes Engaged*.

Tribal feedback is incorporated into the opportunities and risks discussion later in this update. Ecology will continue to invite engagement and consultation with Tribal governments, staff, and organizations to discuss geothermal energy considerations affecting Tribal rights, resources, and interests.

Interagency meetings

Ecology convenes monthly interagency coordination meetings with representatives from the state departments of Archaeological and Historic Preservation, Commerce, Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources including the Washington Geological Survey, and state Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council.

These regular meetings provide agencies the opportunity to exchange information, discuss regulatory or policy issues, prepare for community engagement, and ensure consistent, collaborative planning. Topics typically include technical and scientific coordination, regulatory policy alignment, outreach and engagement planning, and information sharing and external coordination.

Ecology and its agency partners engaged directly with various local, state and federal agencies to share information on geothermal-related activities and broader energy and land-management activities. These include meetings with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service to better understand federal geothermal leasing processes and timelines that may intersect with state planning. The state team also met with the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Geothermal and the National Association of State Energy Officials, enabling Washington to join a multi-state [Geothermal Power Accelerator](https://www.naseo.org/topics/geothermal-power-accelerator)⁴⁰ group. State-to-state coordination also includes outreach to Oregon to gather insight regarding their geothermal experience and explore opportunities for shared learning. In addition, Ecology engaged several county planning departments to understand local considerations and needs.

Opportunities and risks

Throughout the collaborative process, we are engaging communities, Tribes, utilities, industry, agencies, and other interested parties to identify opportunities and risks associated with geothermal energy resources in Washington. There is a high level of interest in the collaborative process and how outcomes and findings will inform communities and Tribes about geothermal energy development. We received a wide range of questions reflecting interest in both the technical feasibility and broader planning context of geothermal energy in Washington.

⁴⁰ <https://www.naseo.org/topics/geothermal-power-accelerator>

The themes summarized below reflect statewide and focus area-specific considerations raised throughout the collaborative process. These themes will be used to inform future engagement. Detailed summaries for the virtual and in-person engagement workshops and Tribal forums are available on the [geothermal collaborative process website](#).⁴¹

Overarching themes

Opportunities

Participants noted geothermal energy could represent a renewable source of consistent power that can help utilities meet state clean energy requirements, support electrical reliability and reduce risks to the Pacific Northwest energy grid. Some noted that geothermal development for microgrids or local power supply could support efforts to alleviate transmission capacity issues. It could also present opportunities to strengthen local and Tribal energy resilience through geothermal microgrid applications.

Geothermal development could provide local employment, build local competitiveness and provide broad economic development benefits by creating jobs, supporting workforce development, enabling cost-competitive energy production, and helping revitalize rural economies. Development could support public education about clean energy, including geothermal resources. Depending on project's location, it could also create opportunities for multi-use applications, including both electricity generation and direct-use heating and cooling. Other opportunities could include incentives and financial assistance for developers, communities, and Tribes to support feasibility studies on resource potential.

Risks

Participants raised concerns about the potential environmental impacts of developing geothermal energy and effects on Tribal rights, interests, and resources, including cultural resources. The impacts on wildlife and fish, including nesting seasons and migration corridors, needs to be understood. There could be habitat loss and harm to endangered species, including salmon.

There could be risks to water quality and water supplies, including the potential for groundwater contamination. Geologic and seismic hazards such as induced seismicity and ground deformation could be potential risks for existing surface infrastructure such as hydropower dams. There could also be risks to facilities from volcanic activity and lahars or debris flows.

Related to emerging technologies, there are also risks to project longevity if new technologies do not perform as expected. The lack of information about these technologies may present a risk in adequately determining potential impacts.

Additional risks include recreational impacts and restrictions on public use of geothermal lease areas, release of heat into the environment, air quality impacts—including fugitive dust and

⁴¹ <https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/sepa/clean-energy/geothermal>

greenhouse gas emissions, sulfurous odor emissions, wildfire risk from transmission infrastructure, and visual quality and aesthetics impacts—particularly on protected viewsheds.

Research needs

Participants noted additional studies and information are needed to adequately consider impacts. Key topics include identifying geothermal energy technologies suitable for Washington and compiling lessons learned from the oil and gas industry and other geothermal projects.

Research could also include documenting data gaps for the focus areas and additional geothermal research in other areas of the state that may be developed for geothermal resources, including the Columbia Basin and Eastern Washington. Other research includes additional seismicity studies and assessments about hazards and available temperature data. They noted it would be important to characterize the injection fluids that would be used to determine potential water quality impacts. Approaches for identifying and addressing seismic and water quality risks are likely to be needed.

Siting and development factors

Participants stated that siting and development must include conducting early engagement and consultation with communities and Tribes. They noted how important it is to have economic cost-benefit analyses and hiring strategies for local workers included as part of project planning to understand benefits and impacts to communities.

Siting concerns include the focus areas are in mostly undeveloped and remote locations which could mean a need for transmission infrastructure and access roads which could result in greater impacts. They noted the existing statewide constraints on transmission capacity for new generation sources should be considered early when siting projects. Some participants suggested developers consider how geothermal could align with other energy projects and provide opportunities to upgrade transmission lines. Siting in undeveloped locations also could result in increased impact to fish and wildlife species relying on this habitat.

Other siting factors include the location of seismic faults, potential for facilities to induce seismicity, and the need for site-specific studies and monitoring. Development concerns also include drilling and exploration costs and limited funding availability for early-stage feasibility and test wells.

Depending on project type and location, geothermal projects could also use filtering technology to extract minerals from subsurface fluids and the minerals sold to offset plant operating costs. Participants also noted the Mount Baker and Mount St. Helens focus areas contain high elevation lands with winter weather conditions that could make siting and facility access more difficult.

Regulations and policy

Discussion indicated a need for understanding local, state and federal regulations and permitting requirements to support geothermal development. This includes identifying a clear

regulatory framework for geothermal energy development and any regulatory or policy gaps. It will be important to clarify oversight roles across local, state and federal agencies and identify regulatory differences regarding the different types of geothermal energy technologies. Examples of regulatory topics discussed include exploratory drilling requirements, geothermal resource ownership, water rights, and state land leasing. There were also questions about alignment between the state and federal geothermal regulations and leasing processes. Additional considerations include continued compliance, incorporating new technologies, and long-term monitoring after facilities closures.

Geographic focus areas

Many of the opportunities and risks discussed for the focus areas are consistent with the overarching themes already discussed. The collaborative process workshops were attended by community members who identified specific concerns and benefits.

Mount Baker

There was support for geothermal energy providing local energy independence for Whatcom and Skagit counties. Skagit County has limited independent power production and geothermal may present opportunities for energy generation. The Nooksack Indian Tribe and Whatcom County Public Utility District conducted a prefeasibility assessment for the Mount Baker (Kweq' Smánit) region to determine potential next steps.⁴²

Risks include impacts to Baker Lake, Baker River, and salmon recovery. The area has many recreational uses and there are concerns about impacts on the recreation economy. Concerns were raised about risks to nearby hydropower dams from drilling and operations of geothermal facilities.

The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community raised concerns about impacts to Tribal and cultural resources from exploration activities and future operations. They expressed specific concerns about impacts and cumulative pressures from hydropower infrastructure and increased recreational use. They stated that all of the Mount Baker area is important to the Tribe for natural, cultural, and Tribal resources and are opposed to geothermal energy development and related transmission lines and roads, specifically on the south side focus area of Mount Baker, Baker Lake, and Baker River.

Impacts on Tribal resources can only be understood from within the unique cultural context of a specific-affected Tribe. Specific project impacts would be determined through engagement and in consultation with each potentially affected individual Tribe at the project level.

Mount St. Helens

Opportunities discussed for the Mount St. Helens area were consistent with the overarching themes. Concerns were raised about increases in water temperature and impacts to salmon

⁴² Hotrock Energy Research Organization. (2025, December). Mt. Baker/Kweq' Smánit Region Prefeasibility Geothermal Resource Assessment Final Report. https://www.pudwhatcom.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/MtBakerGeoPrefeasibility_Final_Report_12_2025.pdf

and steelhead in the Lewis and Wind rivers, as well as impacts to long-term salmon recovery for Spirit Lake.

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe raised concerns about potential impacts to Tribal and cultural resources and specifically identified the Mount. St. Helens (lawilát̓a) Traditional Cultural Property. Tribes also expressed interest in the potential for geothermal to support energy sovereignty and to reduce the use of fossil fuels and hydropower.

In addition, there were concerns about sediment loading and landslides, including seismic events impacting the Spirit Lake outflow⁴³ or contributing to sediment flows downstream of projects. The area continues to have sediment issues following the 1980 Mount St. Helens eruption. Additional concerns include development near the town of Cougar along State Route 503 and potential for increased landslide activity.

For the north side of Mount St. Helens, there are also long-term goals to acquire area private lands for public use and to reconnect trails,⁴⁴ which could affect facility siting.

Wind River valley

Participants raised concerns about impacts to Carson Hot Springs. They asked about economic benefits for communities, including whether counties would receive economic benefits beyond lease payments and job creation such as tax credits or financial incentives. Opportunities discussed included microgrid-scale geothermal systems that could power affordable housing in Skamania County, add to regional power supplies, and provide electricity and direct use applications for heating and cooling.

Regarding siting factors, participants also noted there is mineral rich groundwater in this area which may lead to corrosion and long-term maintenance needs for facilities. Potential risks to multiple scenic and protected areas include private, state, and federal lands with conservation easements or other legal instruments that prohibit this type of energy development. They specifically mentioned potential impacts to the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and viewshed. Participants also spoke about cumulative impacts associated with other developments in the region, including transmission projects and data centers.

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe and community members spoke of potential impacts to Tribal and cultural resources in the area, including Mount. St. Helens (lawilát̓a) Traditional Cultural Property and the Wind River Historic District.

Potential impacts

Ecology is conducting technical research and analysis about emerging geothermal technologies, potential impacts, mitigation strategies, and facility siting considerations. Results from this

⁴³ U.S. Forest Service. (n.d.) Spirit Lake Outflow Safety Improvement Project. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/giffordpinchot/projects/66482>

⁴⁴ U.S. Forest Service. (n.d.) Looking Forward Strategic Investment Plan. Gifford Pinchot National Forest Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. <https://www.cwcog.org/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/01/MSHNVMSstrategicInvestmentPlan.pdf>

research are expected in summer 2026. We will share results in fall of 2026 and collect additional feedback and input that will be included in the final June 2027 legislative report.

The assessment will consider impacts that may occur during site selection, exploration, construction, operation, and decommissioning. Resource topics include those identified in Senate Bill 6039 and the [Washington State Environmental Policy Act](#)⁴⁵:

- Tribal rights, interests, and resources
- Environmental justice and overburdened communities
- Earth, including seismicity
- Air, including greenhouse gas life-cycle emissions
- Water resources, including surface water and groundwater
- Plants and animals, including state and federally listed species
- Energy and natural resources
- Environmental health and safety, including noise
- Land and shoreline use
- Housing
- Aesthetics, including light and glare
- Recreation
- Historic and cultural resources
- Transportation
- Public services and utilities

This section provides a high-level summary of potential impacts associated with geothermal energy development in Washington for some of the resources listed above.

Tribal rights, interests, and resources. Potential impacts include disturbance or loss of resources such as impacts on plant and animal species used by Tribal members. These include medicinal and traditional plants and foods; loss of or modification to habitats; loss of access to traditional use areas; impacts on archaeological sites, traditional cultural properties or spiritual areas; and disruption and degradation to the health and mental wellbeing of Tribal members. Mount. St. Helens (lawilát̓a) is a Traditional Cultural Property and project-specific evaluations would be needed to determine potential impacts. The significance of Tribal resources can only be understood within the cultural context of an affected Tribe. Specific project impacts would be determined through engagement and in consultation with each potentially affected Tribe.

Historic and cultural resources. Potential impacts to historic and cultural resources could occur from direct disturbance or loss of a resource, or from indirect disturbances such as noise or visual impacts. Resources include documented or undocumented archaeological sites, historic buildings and structures, human remains and cemeteries, sacred sites, and traditional cultural properties. Mount. St. Helens (lawilát̓a) is a Traditional Cultural Property and project-specific evaluations would be needed to determine potential impacts. The significance of each historic

⁴⁵ <https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/sepa/environmental-review>

or cultural resource is unique to that resource; therefore, the impact analysis will also be unique and would need to be conducted during any future project-level review, in consultation with Tribes and Department of Archaeological and Historic Preservation.

Plants and animals, including endangered species. Geothermal development could impact biological resources including plant and animal species listed for protection under state and federal laws due to habitat loss, alteration, or fragmentation, changes in water quality and quantity, and noise, vibration, or seismic disturbances.

Overburdened communities. Overburdened communities could face additional burdens related to environmental impacts, construction traffic, drilling methods, noise, water allocation, and land-use changes. Economic and community impacts may arise depending on siting and project design, as well as impacts to resources such as recreation or visual changes to the landscape.

Induced seismicity. Geothermal project development and operations could result in seismic impacts such as minor earthquakes triggered by injecting fluids underground, particularly in enhanced geothermal systems. Risk levels will depend on local faults and underground stress conditions. DNR is working on preliminary induced seismic hazard assessments for the three focus areas, and a summary of findings will be included in the final report. These studies will provide information to the public and assist industry in conducting high-level exploration planning for potential geothermal projects. Site-specific hazard modeling would be needed to understand project risks, and long-term seismic monitoring and mitigation would likely be required.

Water use and water quality. Groundwater withdrawals, water quality changes, and contamination are all potential impacts from geothermal energy projects. Since geothermal drilling and operations use water and can produce waste fluids, there is potential for contamination if fluids move upward into aquifers or if injected water changes groundwater chemistry. Federal and state regulations protect groundwater and would apply to drilling, construction, and operations. Water use and water quality would be analyzed during environmental review and permitting. Additional groundwater data may need to be gathered to understand the potential impacts. Monitoring of flow rates and water quality may be required and operations adjusted as needed. Water regulations will be considered for the regulatory gap analysis.

Other resources. Other impacted resources could include recreation, noise from construction and operations, subsurface resources and uses, changes in land use or impacts to nearby uses, and aesthetics and visual resources changes.

Siting factors

This section summarizes some of the factors that guide the identification of preferred sites for geothermal resource development in Washington. They focus on geological, environmental,

and infrastructure-related conditions that influence both the feasibility of geothermal resource development and the potential for environmental or community impacts.

Core siting considerations include geologic suitability, proximity to electrical transmission and distribution infrastructure, and connectivity between underground and surface water resources. Siting a geothermal project also depends on land classification, ownership, regulatory requirements, and the potential for impacts. The technical research available this fall will include more detail about siting and development factors.

Geologic suitability. Viable geothermal resources depend on specific subsurface conditions. Adequate heat, permeability, and fluid-bearing rock must be present at depths accessible by modern drilling technology. Favorability modeling highlighted the focus areas where faults and elevated geothermal gradients suggest promising geothermal conditions. Additional research, data collection, and exploratory drilling are needed to determine suitability for a specific project-site. Other factors include the geothermal energy technology to be used (i.e., conventional, advanced or enhanced systems).

Proximity to electrical transmission and distribution infrastructure. Distance to existing transmission lines or substations, the capacity of existing infrastructure to support new generation, and the need for potential upgrades all influence siting decisions. Remote settings can pose interconnection challenges and higher costs; in some cases, local non-grid geothermal use may be more feasible.

Connectivity between groundwater and surface water resources. Hydrologic conditions influence both feasibility and environmental sensitivity and may help identify locations where geothermal operations interact with connected water systems, supporting early avoidance or mitigation planning.

Competing land uses. Areas where geothermal resources can be developed may overlap with lands valued for recreation, forestry, agricultural or other uses. Siting considerations include potential conflicts where development could affect access to land or water resources important to other users.

Regulatory and land-use restrictions. Siting depends on land status and ownership, elevation restrictions, and land-use restrictions, including measures to protect biological diversity or natural, recreational, or cultural uses. These factors influence access, permitting pathways, and the feasibility of infrastructure development.

Potential for environmental and community impacts. Siting decisions must also consider the potential impacts to environment, communities, and Tribes. Areas with lower potential for impacts may be more suitable for exploration or development.

Regulatory overview and gap analysis

This section provides an overview of the existing regulatory framework governing geothermal energy development in Washington and identifies potential gaps that may require further

evaluation. Technical research on the regulatory framework and gaps is underway, and we will share those results in fall 2026 to inform the final 2027 legislative report.

Developers seeking to build and operate geothermal projects in Washington will need a range of approvals and permits from local, state, and federal agencies. Project planning and permitting is complex since each project and site is unique. Multiple permitting requirements, site considerations, land use and zoning restrictions, and environmental considerations all inform the regulatory process.

Needed permits cover activities such as exploratory well drilling, construction, and plant operations. They also address water quality, wastewater discharge, and underground injection of fluids. Figure 9 below is a high-level view of various regulatory authorities held by state and federal agencies during the lifecycle of a geothermal energy project. This includes the facility site as well as access roads and transmission lines.

In addition to permits, projects on private, state, or federal lands require land agreements, leases, or licenses for well exploration and plant operations. Additional rights-of-ways may be required for access roads and transmission lines. The technical research available later this fall will include information about leasing processes.

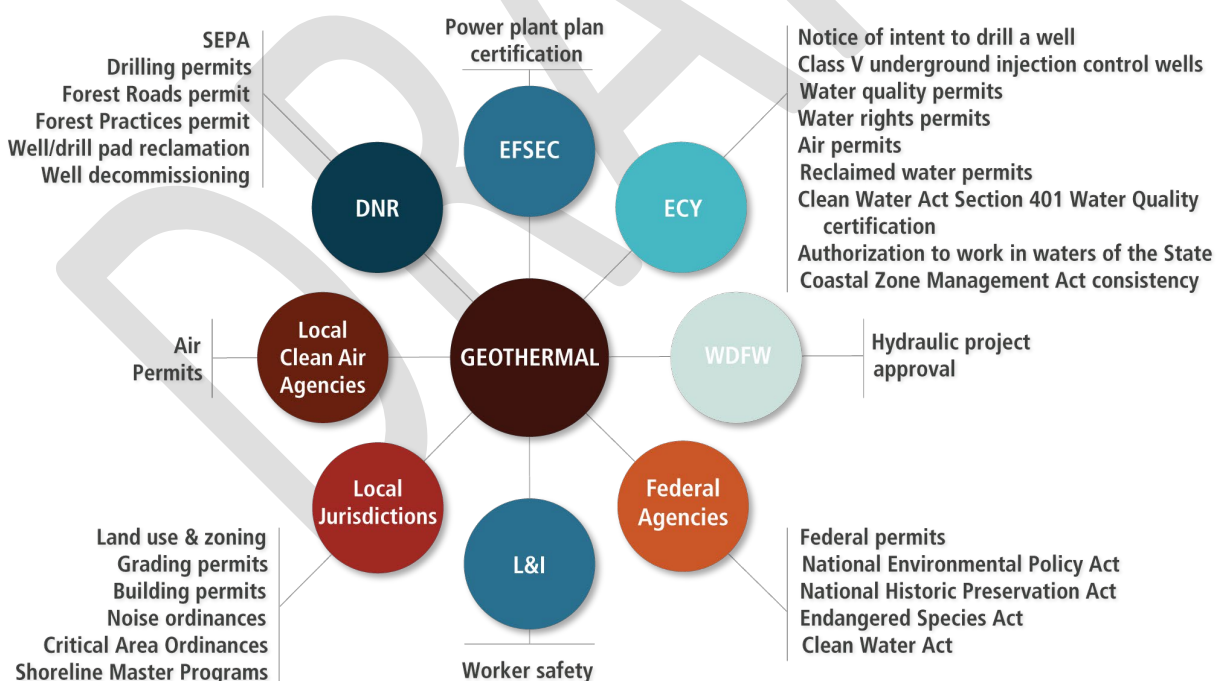


Figure 9. Overview of relevant regulatory authorities

Preliminary recommendations

This section provides preliminary recommendations for advancing geothermal energy in Washington. The collaborative process will continue to inform, refine, and expand on these preliminary recommendations and develop others for the June 2027 final legislative report. Several of these recommendations correspond to broader clean energy recommendations of the [Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council](#).⁴⁶ Agencies should continue to look for opportunities to leverage broader clean energy efforts to include geothermal energy resources.

Topic: Update the Washington State Energy Strategy

To support the next iteration of the [state energy strategy](#)⁴⁷ in 2028, fund the analysis and modeling work for geothermal energy production. Feedback from the collaborative process can help inform modeling scenarios for the energy strategy as well as provide key policy questions to be considered by interested parties. Emerging geothermal technologies were largely untested when the strategy was developed in 2021, so information about electricity generated by geothermal energy was unavailable. Geothermal energy could be significant and the updated strategy should reflect the newest technologies and data, existing models and assumptions.

Topic: Expand agency coordination

Continue coordinating with federal agencies to identify opportunities for increased collaboration. This could include data gathering, technical assistance, and federal geothermal leasing. Examples of existing coordination include regular meetings between state agencies and the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Geological Survey and Bureau of Land Management to provide updates on geothermal topics and share data. Ecology and DNR are also meeting with federal agencies to learn more about the federal geothermal leases processes under review for the Mount Baker and Wind River valley areas.

Identify and implement opportunities for increased collaboration with other states.

Washington is participating in the multi-state [Geothermal Power Accelerator](#)⁴⁸ group, which offers opportunities to gather insights from federal agencies, the geothermal industry, and other state geothermal experiences as well as explore opportunities for shared learning. Washington is also working with the [Pacific Coast Collaborative](#)⁴⁹ geothermal working group to develop collaborative policy for geothermal resources with other West Coast states.

Topic: Support funding for exploration and development

⁴⁶ <https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/sepa/clean-energy/council>

⁴⁷ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.21F.090>

⁴⁸ <https://www.naseo.org/topics/geothermal-power-accelerator>

⁴⁹ <https://pacificcoastcollaborative.org/>

Recommend funding the geothermal exploration grant program established by Senate Bill 6039 authorizing Commerce to provide cost-share grants to incentivize investment in drilling and early-phase geothermal investigations.⁵⁰ To provide meaningful support, the funding level need would be in the millions of dollars. Funding exploratory drilling was also recommended by the Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council in its [2025 annual legislative report](#).⁵¹

Identify federal funding opportunities and strategic partnerships. The U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Geothermal is considering providing funding to states through the national labs for technical assistance regarding geothermal resources and development. As federal funding becomes available, state agencies should seek funding and engage industry, utilities, Tribes, and communities surrounding technical assistance needs.

Review various state and federal funding mechanisms to streamline the opportunities available for geothermal development. This would include a review of federal grant programs and cost-share programs to identify ways funding can be matched with the needs for exploration and development of geothermal energy.

Topic: Provide guidance and tools

Develop a guidebook on regulatory and environmental review requirements for developing geothermal energy projects in Washington, from exploration through operations and project decommissioning. This tool would support developers, industry, Tribes, communities, and state and local agencies in understanding the required processes and timelines for developing a geothermal energy project. The guidebook would also include guidance on engaging communities and Tribes in environmental review and permitting processes for geothermal projects.

Develop geothermal energy guidance, policy objectives, and model ordinances for local governments to incorporate into their comprehensive plans and development regulations. This corresponds with broader recommendations by the Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council to incorporate clean energy into local government planning.

Topic: Improve community and Tribal engagement and outreach

Develop guidance and best practices to help developers and local governments effectively engage communities and Tribes in geothermal energy resource planning and project development. There is a substantial lack of public information on what geothermal energy is, and the differences between using geothermal energy for direct heating purposes and to produce electricity. These tools would provide objective and factual information about geothermal technologies in accessible ways.

⁵⁰ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.31.038>

⁵¹ Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council. (October 2025). Improving Clean Energy Project Siting and Permitting. <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2506011.html>

Providing a common understanding of new geothermal technologies also aligns with broader clean energy recommendations by the Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council for engagement and outreach.

Topic: Support use of community and Tribal benefit agreements

Develop guidance on community and Tribal benefit agreements. These provide clear understanding of how a geothermal energy project benefits local communities and Tribes. Benefit agreements, whether voluntary or required, are one method for developers to collaborate with communities and Tribes on project benefits. These agreements can address a wide variety of topics. Examples include strategies for local hiring, job training, and workforce development.

Commerce conducted an initial internal assessment in 2025 to identify opportunities, barriers, and best practices for establishing community benefit agreements for clean energy.⁵² Future guidance should include geothermal energy.

Topic: Promote Tribal geothermal energy exploration and development

Consider options to support Tribal geothermal energy projects, including projects owned by or jointly developed with Tribes and private or public developers. This supports Tribal energy sovereignty and economic and community development. It also leverages the expertise of Tribal members and industry. Promoting Tribal projects could be done in a variety of ways such as funding prefeasibility studies or technical assistance.

Potential impacts to Tribal rights, interests, and resources would be addressed during project siting and design. This effort also corresponds with broader recommendations by the Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council to provide support for Tribal clean energy projects.

Next steps

This legislative update provides overviews of geothermal energy and an update on the collaborative process. In April 2026, Ecology released a draft update for public and Tribal review. We will consider those comments and feedback as we revise the legislative update for submittal in June 2026.

In addition, we will continue public engagement, Tribal forums, and agency coordination for the rest of 2026 and early 2027 using virtual and in-person formats. Events will include workshops and Tribal forums for the three focus areas. Input we receive through the collaborative process will inform recommendations for the final June 2027 legislative report.

⁵² Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council. 2025.

Appendix A. Interested Parties and Tribes Engaged

The following lists identify the interested parties and Tribes engaged as of spring 2026, organized by type.

Government organizations:

- City of Mercer Island
- City of Milton
- City of Oak Harbor
- City of Selah
- City of Spokane
- City of Tacoma
- Columbia River Gorge Commission
- Cowlitz County
- Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments
- Island County
- Port of Kalama
- Puget Sound Partnership
- Skagit County Planning and Development Services
- Skamania County
- Snohomish Conservation District
- Snohomish County
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. House of Representatives
- U.S. Senate
- Whatcom County

Industry organizations and businesses:

- Alpine Flamingo
- Anchor QEA
- Arbaugh & Associates
- Aspect Consulting
- Barker Drilling
- BGC Engineering
- BP p.l.c.
- Brookfield Renewable Corporation
- Cascadia Law Group
- Darcy Solutions
- David Evans and Associates

- EKI Environment & Water
- Environmental Science Associates
- Epic Engineering
- Fervo Energy
- Geosyntec Consultants
- GRAM Northwest
- Green Diamond Resource Co.
- GSI Water Solutions
- Haley & Aldrich
- Herrera Environmental
- Hexagon Energy
- Invenergy
- John I. Haas
- Kimley-Horn
- McKinstry
- MPERA Geotechnical & Earthquake Engineering
- Nel Hydrogen
- NewsData
- Nomalo
- North Pacific Paper Corporation
- Obsidian Renewables
- Ormat Technologies
- Pacifica Marine
- Par Pacific
- Pend Oreille Valley Railroad
- RDS Disposal
- RESPEC
- S&P Global
- Shuttle Systems
- Side x Side Architects
- Simplot Company
- Sinclair Well Products
- Smart Land Use Consulting
- Spryng Energy
- SWS Geothermal
- Tetra Tech
- Triangle Associates
- Trinity Consultants
- UMC, Inc.
- Van Ness Feldman
- Vulcan Geoscience
- Weyerhaeuser

- Wisewood Energy
- XGS Energy

Research or academia organizations:

- Central Washington University
- Idaho National Laboratory
- National Laboratory of the Rockies
- Pacific Northwest National Laboratory
- Pacific Northwest Seismic Network
- Portland State University
- The Evergreen State College
- Washington State University Extension
- Western Washington University

Other organizations:

- Cascade Forest Conservancy
- Clark-Skamania Flyfishers
- Clean & Prosperous Institute
- Clean Air Task Force
- Clean Energy Transition Institute
- CleanTech Alliance
- Climate Jobs Washington
- Columbia Riverkeeper
- Cowlitz Economic Development Council
- EarthGen
- Energy Northwest
- Front and Centered
- Geothermal Rising
- Hotrock Energy Research Organization
- Mount St. Helens Institute
- Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association
- NW Energy Coalition
- Pollution Prevention Resource Center
- Project InnerSpace
- Puget Soundkeeper Alliance
- RE Sources
- Renewable Hydrogen Alliance
- Skagit Citizens Climate Lobby
- Skagit Valley Clean Energy Alliance
- Spark Northwest
- Sustainable Connections
- The Nature Conservancy

- Washington Conservation Action
- Whatcom Community Foundation
- Whatcom Land Trust
- Wind River Trust

Federally recognized Tribes and Tribal organizations:

- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation*
- Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation*
- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation*
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon
- Cowlitz Indian Tribe*
- Hoh Indian Tribe*
- Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe
- Kalispel Tribe of Indians
- Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe
- Lummi Nation*
- Makah Tribe
- Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
- Nez Perce Tribe*
- Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Nooksack Indian Tribe*
- Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe*
- Puyallup Tribe
- Quileute Tribe
- Quinault Indian Nation
- Samish Indian Nation
- Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe
- Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe
- Skokomish Indian Tribe
- Snoqualmie Indian Tribe
- Spokane Tribe of Indians
- Squaxin Island Tribe*
- Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians
- Suquamish Tribe
- Swinomish Indian Tribal Community*
- Tulalip Tribes
- Upper Skagit Indian Tribe
- Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians*
- Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
- Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
- Upper Columbia United Tribes

*Tribe met with Ecology, participated in Tribal forum, attended public webinar or workshop, or submitted comments.

Utilities and public utility districts

- Avista Corporation
- Big Bend Electric Cooperative
- Cascade Natural Gas Corporation
- Chelan County Public Utility District (PUD)
- Clallam County PUD
- Clark Public Utilities (Clark PUD)
- Cowlitz County PUD
- Douglas County PUD
- Franklin PUD
- Lewis County PUD
- Okanogan County PUD
- Olympic View Water and Sewer District
- Public Generating Pool
- Puget Sound Energy
- Seattle City Light
- Skamania County PUD
- Snohomish PUD
- Thurston PUD
- Washington Public Utility Districts Association
- Whatcom County PUD