

Focus on:

Clean Water Guidance

Suites of Practices



Figure 1. Guidance includes recommendations for landuse practices, including irrigation management, to protect water.

Guidance for healthy farms & water

Washington is home to some of the nation's most productive farmlands. The way landowners manage their lands also has important impacts on water quality. Agricultural operators are key partners in our efforts to support clean and cool water for drinking, recreation, shellfish harvesting, and salmon recovery across the state.

The Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture (Clean Water Guidance) outlines Ecology's recommended best management practices (BMPs) to protect and restore water quality. The guidance is intended to support healthy farms while helping producers meet clean water standards.

Developing recommendations

The Clean Water Guidance advisory group helped us develop recommendations that cover the breadth of BMPs commonly used by producers and to be responsive to the diversity of agricultural types in our state.

The advisory group included representatives from Producer Groups, Washington State University-Extension, Conservation Districts, the State Conservation Commission, Washington State Dept. of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service

(NRCS), Environmental Protection Agency, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, and other agricultural and conservation experts.

Suites of practices overview

Farms are complex operations shaped by factors including location, climate, soil type, and production methods. With this variability, protecting water quality requires a thoughtful combination of structural, vegetative, and management practices.

To help with implementation, we've created a "road map" for identifying recommended combinations of BMPs that are included in the guidance - the **suites of practices**. While agricultural systems are diverse, many crop and livestock operations share common characteristics and rely on similar BMPs to reduce potential impacts to water health.

When reviewing the guidance, we recommend starting with the introduction and suites of practices. These sections provide a foundation and help guide operators to BMP-specific recommendations. For additional information on implementation and effectiveness, see the related appendix.

Site-specific factors will determine recommendations

Our goal is to assist producers to identify site-specific practices that fully protect water quality, reflective of their farm's unique considerations.

Operation categories

To support on-the-ground management decisions, the suites are organized by three agricultural operation categories:

Livestock operations

Grazing management practices can maintain healthy pastures and rangelands while protecting water by reducing runoff, preventing erosion, preserving riparian areas, and by promoting healthy forage use.

Animal confinement and manure management practices help control livestock and waste to protect surface and groundwater, promote animal welfare, enhance farm efficiency, and support nutrient recycling.

Row crop, small grains, and forage crop operations

Practices are intended to reduce erosion and runoff, improve infiltration, maintain soil fertility, and support efficient, resilient, and environmentally sustainable cropping systems.

Tree fruit, vineyards, and perennial berry operations

Practices are intended to reduce erosion and runoff, improve infiltration, and maintain soil fertility.

Primary and supporting practices

Each suite of BMPs is divided into two tiers, to be used in combination depending on an operation's unique conditions:

Primary best management practices

Foundational practices that when properly implemented and maintained are expected to protect and restore water quality.

Supporting practices

Practices that complement the primary BMPs and may be used to address site-specific factors.

Using the Clean Water Guidance

Provide assurances & assistance

The Clean Water Guidance is designed to provide producers with certainty and predictability. When an operation implements recommended practices that aligns with the guidance and are reflective of site-specific conditions, Ecology will presume water quality is protected.

We also use the guidance to inform watershed cleanup plan development and when providing technical and financial assistance. Each year, Ecology awards millions of dollars to fund clean water projects. By integrating the guidance into our funding program, we can direct financial assistance towards both implementation and maintenance of practices that support healthy water as well as farms.

Connection to other guidance

The Clean Water Guidance is a resource for the agricultural community that complements existing

conservation guidance, including NRCS Field Office Technical Guides (FOTGs). It does not replace FOTGs, the farm planning process, or establish new regulatory requirements. Clean Water Guidance BMPs should be considered when planning and selecting practices with the goal of protecting water quality.

Is it required?

While the recommendations are designed to protect water health, they are not required. Using Ecology's guidance provides an opportunity to proactively protect and restore water quality. As these practices were evaluated for their effectiveness in supporting clean water, they can offer assurances to both us and landowners.

At the same time, not implementing recommended practices does not automatically mean water quality is negatively impacted. Along with our partners, we are open to site-specific solutions. Ecology remains responsible for determining if water quality is protected based on site-specific conditions.

Access the guidance

Visit our [webpage](#)¹ for more information on the guidance and to access materials:



We're here to help!

Reach out to learn about assistance that may be available to you to implement and maintain BMPs.

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ADA accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, email kathryn.loy@ecy.wa.gov, call (564)669-9205 or dial 711 to call through the Washington Telecommunications Relay for services like text telephone (TTY). Visit ecology.wa.gov/ADA for more accessibility information.

¹ <https://ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/plans-policies/plan-to-control-nonpoint-sources-of-pollution>