

Focus on: Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Grant

Why it matters

Nutrient pollution negatively impacts aquatic life and affects the health of Puget Sound. Excess nutrients from humans cause a domino effect in the ecosystem by fueling excessive algae growth, which reduces the amount of oxygen in the water. Aquatic life need oxygen in the water to thrive.

A major contributing factor to these low oxygen levels is wastewater treatment facilities discharging excess nutrients. Fortunately, there are solutions to this problem. The Washington State Legislature provided funding to invest in communities' critical wastewater infrastructure and reduce the amount of nutrients they release. The funding helps increase monitoring and improves how facilities operate.

This is one of the ways we are working with partners to reduce nutrients and provide a cleaner, healthier future for Puget Sound.

About the program

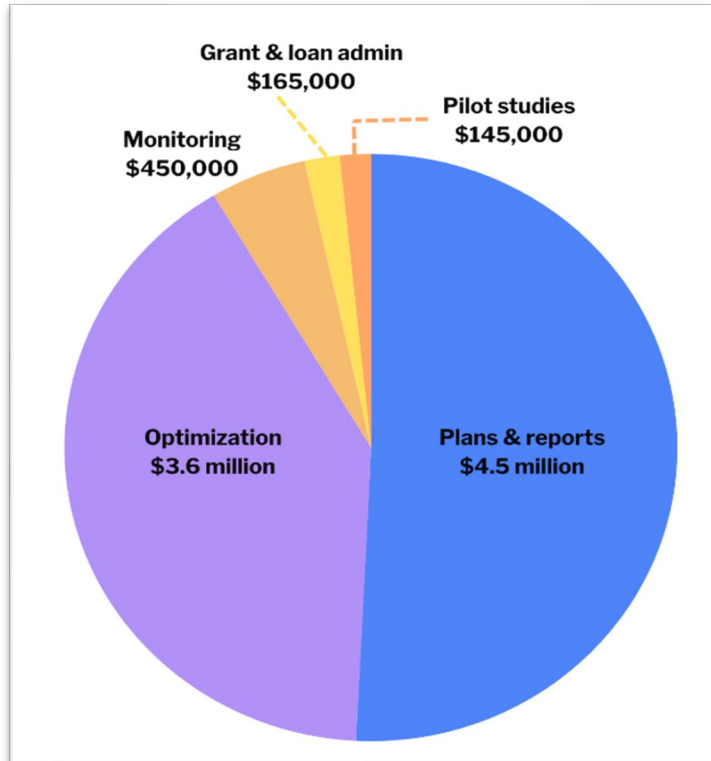
The Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Grant Program funds wastewater treatment facilities planning and implementation of important upgrades that reduce nutrients going into Puget Sound. The program's main goal is to ease the financial burden on municipalities and support long-term nutrient management across the region. In 2025, the program was folded into the [Water Quality Combined Funding Program](#) to allow facilities to use both nutrient reduction funding and Clean Water State Revolving Fund financing as their projects move through planning, design, and construction. Combining the programs helps meet the larger investments needed for these kinds of infrastructure upgrades.

Phase 1 funding

The first phase of funding was awarded in 2024 and focused on nutrient monitoring, planning, and process adjustments for 55 facilities. We funded nearly \$8.75 million in nutrient reduction activities (see graph below).

A few examples of upgrades that facilities have leveraged funding for include:

- Installing or upgrading equipment to enhance the wastewater treatment process.
- Upgrading equipment and installing sensors that provide real-time information on nutrients and dissolved oxygen levels.
- Updating computer systems to monitor and control the treatment process.



Project highlight: Birch Bay Water & Sewer District

Funding amount: \$138,924

Project: Birch Bay Wastewater Treatment Plant

What did they do with the money?

Birch Bay Wastewater Treatment Plant developed a plan to evaluate potential process control changes to their facility. They also began working on a plan for a potential larger upgrade in the future. Additionally, they added a treatment step to the incoming wastewater to make it easier to remove nutrients. The facility also upgraded their monitoring and control systems to support nitrogen removal.

How were they successful?

After Birch Bay Wastewater Treatment Plant's upgrades, they increased nitrogen removal from 40% to at least 63%.

This small facility is a strong example of how leveraging grant funds can establish a foundation for long-term nutrient management. Their success in managing this grant award and upgrading the facility was a direct result of many years of working towards nutrient removal.



What's next in Phase 2 funding

We awarded \$7.98 million in 2026 to 22 entities that will focus on advancing upgrades identified in planning documents and continuing the planning and optimization work that started in phase 1. Some facilities started implementing this work in July 2026 and have until Summer 2029 to complete their projects.

What can we fund?

We fund projects that advance the baseline understanding of a facilities' treatment capabilities, including projects that inform nutrient management strategies across Puget Sound. Eligible project types also include pilot projects, minor process control changes, or long-term nutrient planning such as capital investment projects. For more information reach out to bri.castilleja@ecy.wa.gov.

How is funding prioritized?

Funding is prioritized based on three factors:

- Age of facility
- Facility location
- Urgency of needed support to avoid system failure and the more severe contamination that would follow.



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