

Department of Ecology

Water Resources Program

Strategic Plan 2025 – 2029

Year 2 Progress Update

July 2025 – June 2026



A Message from Water Resources Program Manager, Ria Berns

I am pleased to share this update on the implementation of our 5-year strategic plan. I am deeply proud of what our team has accomplished in a challenging operating environment, including a spending and hiring freeze that affects Program capacity.

The realities shaping our work are significant and will continue to require us to be thoughtful, adaptable, and focused on the work that matters most:

- ▶ On April 8, 2026, Ecology declared a drought emergency – the fourth consecutive year in which part or all of Washington has been under a drought declaration, and the fourth statewide drought emergency since 2015. Following the fourth warmest winter on record, with more rain than snow, Washington entered the spring with approximately half of its typical snowpack.
- ▶ On June 5, 2026, Governor Ferguson communicated significant state budget shortfalls and asked cabinet agencies to work with the Office of Financial Management on reductions for the next biennium. As we continue pursuing our strategic plan goals, we anticipate adjusting workloads, timelines, and expectations in the coming fiscal year.

Even in these circumstances, we remain committed to advancing a resilient water future for Washington. In the year ahead, we will focus on:

- ▶ Adapting to budget constraints by making meaningful adjustments to workload and expectations, so staff can remain focused on the highest-priority work and sustain progress where it is most needed.
- ▶ Supporting Washington's Water Future through hosting regional roundtables that elevate local challenges and identify barriers and practical solutions tailored to the needs of Washington's diverse watersheds.

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of our work. Please contact Program Planner, Lisa Reymann, with any questions: lisa.reymann@ecy.wa.gov.

Ria Berns

Our Vision

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

Our Mission

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

Our Values

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

Transformational Changes

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



Our Year 2 Progress

The following highlights examples of completed actions that helped advance our strategic plan goals and objectives. This is not intended to capture the entirety of program work.

Key ○ Little progress ● Some progress ● Significant progress

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources

Objectives	Year 2 Progress	Highlights
A. Protect instream resources and senior water rights today and into the future.	●	- Responded to drought in the Yakima Basin by curtailing surface water use to protect water for fish and senior water rights. - Finished development and began testing phase of a new metering portal for external water use data submissions.
B. Advance certainty about existing water rights through adjudication.	●	- Processed 2,232 submitted court claim forms. - Held public events for WRIA 1 water users, launched an online appointment system for virtual and in-person scheduling, partnered with Whatcom County and the Conservation District to provide in-person and online court claim form technical assistance in English and Spanish. - Finished development of WAIS for court claim forms and ensure system can internally track all claim information received from the courts.
C. Bolster dam safety and well construction inspection activities to ensure protection of public health and safety.	●	- Reviewed 27 Dam Safety program policies and made significant changes to 9 policies including language revision and obtaining Tribal input. - Finished development and launched new MyDriller Portal for external well data reporting.
D. Increase public understanding of water resource issues through transparency and proactive education.	●	- Created how-to videos for WebMap tool, gathered region feedback, and presented tool to the Water Resources Advisory Committee. - Assessed public-facing communication material to identify vital documents and accessibility needs and make changes.

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

Objectives	Year 2 Progress	Highlights
A. Build a sense of urgency to address the impacts of climate change on water resources.	●	- Created talking points, graphics, and other visuals to promote an understanding and urgency of climate change impacts on water supply. - Collaborated with University of Washington's Climate Impacts Group to evaluate and advance understanding of water supply changes due to climate change.
B. Improve water supply for instream and out-of-stream needs.	●	- Developed statewide water acquisition strategy priorities and captured in the Request for Qualification and Quotations and contracts for the acquisitions pool. - Hired a new Environmental Justice Planner to develop a program-wide framework that identifies the specific geographic areas and demographic populations that are overburdened and vulnerable for water access and supply.



Objectives	Year 2 Progress	Highlights
C. Promote reforms to state water law to increase the resilience of our state's water resources to climate change.	●	- Sought opportunities to educate and engage with legislators and governor's policy staff about climate change impacts and challenges on water supply. - Launched <u>Washington's Water Future</u>, a statewide initiative to bring communities, Tribes, farmers, businesses, and local leaders together to address the state's growing water challenges.

Goal 3. Hone Our Organizational Effectiveness

Objectives	Year 2 Progress	Highlights
A. Cultivate a work environment that supports and retains staff.	○	Completed Ecology's Respectful Work Environment Policy actions to promote a culture of support and accountability and evaluate staff engagement and feedback for effectiveness.
B. Promote staff professional development.	◐	- Gathered onboarding improvement ideas from employees hired in the last year and created a hub for internal learning resources. - Developed training for the new MyDriller Portal, including external videos and internal training for new features.
C. Ensure our processes and procedures are timely, effective, and consistent statewide.	◐	- Increased communication of policy updates at region section meetings, created training videos for staff, and gave virtual training on POL-1280. - Standardized internal cost reimbursement practices to improve consistency and decision making and finalized new pool of standardized consultants to process applications.
D. Invest in information technology to meet current and future data needs.	○	Initiated a modernization of internal Water Rights Tracking System to incorporate next generation capabilities into an outdated system.

Related Information

- [Water Resources Program Strategic Plan 2025 - 2029:](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2411022.html)
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2411022.html>



Water Resources Program
360-407-6872



To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6872 or email at WRpubs@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

