



Department of Ecology Water Resources Program Strategic Plan 2025 - 2029 Executive Summary



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. Only by bringing explicit focus can we meaningfully address these important issues facing our State's water resources and achieve our Mission.

Climate Change and Population Growth

We must adapt to the impacts of climate change and population growth, which will continue to put pressure on our state's water resources and challenge our ability to fulfill our Mission.

We are already experiencing the acute impact of climate change on water resources across the state: we see less snowfall and earlier snowmelt, meaning our streams have less water when salmon and other aquatic life need it most. At the same time, significant population growth—almost twice the national average—increases pressure on our already-scarce water resources. The confluence of these factors and the corresponding effects on water supplies requires that we rethink our state's approach to water management and water supply development.

Environmental Justice

We must prioritize environmental justice, including implementation of the 2021 HEAL Act and compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, if we are to benefit all Washingtonians.

Our state is ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse—in fact, one of the most linguistically diverse states in the nation. As we work to benefit all Washingtonians, we must proactively address how our decisions contribute to cumulative environmental and health outcomes for overburdened communities and vulnerable populations, as defined in the HEAL Act. To engage all Washingtonians and meet our legal obligations, we need to improve language translation and the accessibility of information. This effort cuts across our Strategic Plan, including budgeting, rulemaking and policy-setting, and communications and engagement.

Plan Overview

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 Strategic Plan is organized into three Goals, each of which has several supporting Objectives, shown below. The full Strategic Plan describes these Goals and Objectives in depth, with nested Strategies that highlight our planned actions.

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources

- A. Protect instream resources and senior water rights today and into the future.
- B. Advance certainty about existing water rights through adjudication.
- C. Bolster dam safety and well construction inspection activities to ensure protection of public health and safety.
- D. Increase public understanding of water resource issues through transparency and proactive education.

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

- A. Build a sense of urgency to address the impacts of climate change on water resources.
- B. Improve water supply for instream and out-of-stream needs.
- C. Promote reforms to state water law to increase the resilience of our state's water resources to climate change.

Goal 3. Hone Our Organizational Effectiveness

- A. Cultivate a work environment that supports and retains staff.
- B. Promote staff professional development.
- C. Ensure our processes and procedures are timely, effective, and consistent statewide.
- D. Invest in information technology to meet current and future data needs.