



Unrealized Ambition: The State Budget and Water Resources Program Priorities

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Overview

- Program Overview
- Water Resources Strategic Plan
- Implementation Update
- Ecology Strategic Plan
- A Look Ahead to Fiscal Year 2026



Water Resources Program: An Overview

Our Foundations

Vision

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

Mission

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

Our Values

We challenge ourselves to continuously improve how we live up to our values of **public service**, **equity**, **innovation**, **excellence**, and **teamwork** every day as we steward a natural resource that is essential to the life and wellbeing of current and future Washingtonians.



Public Service

We work for Washington as we balance the needs of people and the natural environment.

We are courteous and responsive to customers, build and maintain relationships with the communities we serve, and operate with integrity, honesty, and transparency.



Equity

We promote equitable application of our State's water law and access to state resources. Our work helps overburdened communities and vulnerable populations as we aim to benefit all Washingtonians.



Innovation

We support a forward-looking, solutions-oriented approach to managing Washington's water resources. We seek to apply the best science, methods, and tools, and we advance opportunities to modernize our state's approach to water management.



Excellence

We recruit, develop, and retain dedicated, talented staff and hold one another to the highest standard. We are thorough, productive, accurate, and communicative.



Teamwork

We support one another and partner with communities to achieve our Mission. We build and celebrate inclusive teams, encourage diverse perspectives, and foster strong and respectful relationships with internal and external partners.

Water Resources Program: By the Numbers



- 147 FTE (total authority, not filled positions)



- 6 offices (Spokane, Walla Walla, Union Gap, Shoreline, Bellingham, Lacey)



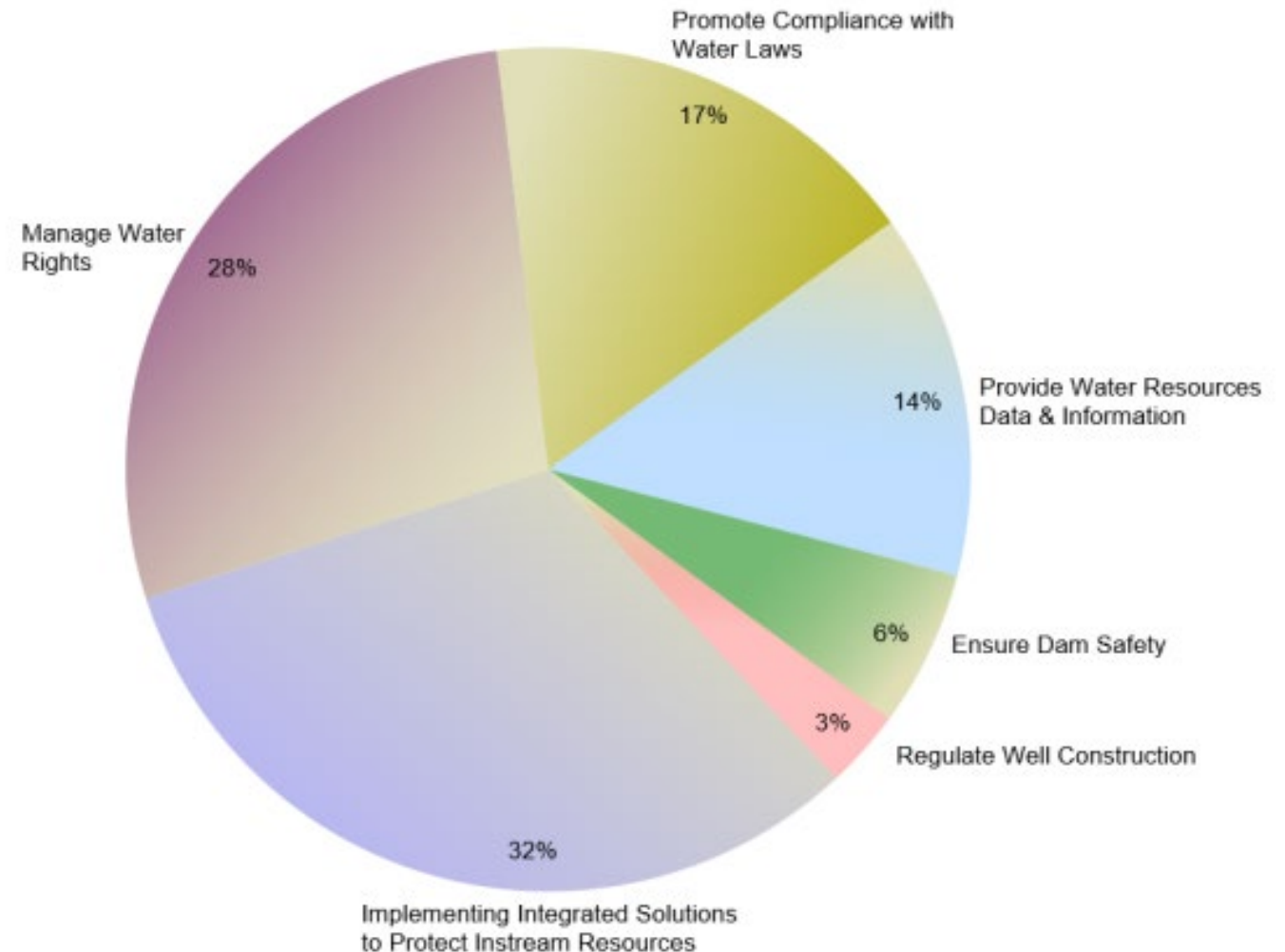
- \$49.2 million biennial operating budget (80% is state general fund)
- \$~100 million biennial capital budget (streamflow restoration, water banking, drought response, and drought preparedness)



- **Key functions:** permitting and compliance, adjudication, dam safety, well construction, grant management, IT and database management

Program Activities by Budget Distribution

1. Implement integrated solutions to protect instream resources
2. Manage water rights
3. Promote compliance with water laws
4. Provide water resources data and information
5. Ensure dam safety
6. Regulate well construction





Water Resources Strategic Plan

A 5-Year Roadmap

Water Resources Strategic Plan: A Road Map for Our Work

- First strategic plan since 2016
- 5-year timeframe (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2029)
- Implementation focused
- Ambitious
- Increases transparency
- Serves as the framework for annual planning



Transformational Changes

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.

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.

Goals

1 Actively
Manage our
State's Water
Resources

2 Prepare
for Changing
Conditions and
Needs due to
Climate Change

3 Hone our
Organizational
Effectiveness

We can only accomplish these goals in partnership with diverse public, Tribal, and private players.

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.

Actively Manage our State's Water Resources: The Approach

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources



A. Protect instream resources and senior water rights today and into the future.

- Take proactive measures to promote compliance through timely technical assistance, voluntary compliance, and escalation to enforcement when prior efforts fall short.
- Create clear compliance and enforcement priorities and processes to promote consistency, defensibility, and effective use of resources.
- Evaluate how more advanced technology can assist on-the-ground water management and oversight.
- Develop and implement a statewide water resources data strategy to improve data access, enhance knowledge and use of data to inform decisions.

B. Advance certainty about existing water rights through adjudication.

- Initiate and maintain ongoing support for adjudication in target basin(s).
- Identify approaches to create efficiencies and ensure successful completion of adjudications.

C. Bolster dam safety and well construction inspection activities to ensure protection of public health and safety.

- Review and update regulations and laws for the dam safety and well construction programs.
- Evaluate current processes to ensure we use current tools and methods to best protect public health and safety.
- Work with local governments to support county-led well delegation programs.

D. Increase public understanding of water resource issues through transparency and proactive education.

- Use strategic design approaches to ensure effective public engagement for meaningful environmental justice assessment in compliance with the HEAL Act.
- Improve internal and external understanding of water right attributes through public education and water rights mapping.
- Provide information that the public can understand through use of plain language, information translation into languages other than English, and document accessibility.
- Develop clear communications that describe watershed-scale water availability and the complexities of the permitting processes.

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources

A. Protect instream resources and senior water rights today and into the future.

- Take proactive measures to promote compliance through timely technical assistance, voluntary compliance, and escalation to enforcement when prior efforts fall short.

ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable	Timeline
a	Follow up on information we receive about illegal water use by providing technical assistance, and escalate to formal enforcement when appropriate.	Compliance Staff	Region Managers	
b	Seek funding for FY25-27 biennium for additional watermaster and compliance staff.	Financial Services Section Manager	Program Manager	
c	In collaboration with EAP and OCR, seek funding to increase the number of Ecology-maintained stream gauges.	Financial Services Section Manager	Deputy Program Manager	
d	Identify groundwater users in the Yakima Basin that don't have metering provisions and send orders to them.	CRO Compliance Lead	CRO Section Manager	

ii. Create clear compliance and enforcement priorities and processes to promote consistency, defensibility, and effective use of resources.

ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable	Timeline
a	Update penalty matrix used to determine civil penalties.	Statewide Compliance Lead	OATS Section Manager	
b	Update compliance policy to reflect current approach and priorities.	Statewide Compliance Lead	OATS Section Manager	
c	Hold regular compliance team meetings.	Statewide Compliance Lead	OATS Section Manager	
d	Develop an annual workplan and team charter for compliance team.	Statewide Compliance Lead	OATS Section Manager	

iii. Evaluate how more advanced technology can assist on-the-ground water management and oversight.

ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable	Timeline
a	Collect data and collaborate with WSU to improve ability and effectiveness in using remote sensing to calculate ET.	OATS Section Manager	Deputy Program Manager	
b	Provide regional cross-training on IT tools such as satellite datasets to support water management, enforcement, and oversight.	Statewide Compliance Lead	OATS Section Manager	
c	Create a complete well location mapping database for Yakima Basin emergency drought wells.	CRO Drought Lead	CRO Section Manager	

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.

We are committed to early and ongoing **consultation and cooperation with Tribes in a government-to-government relationship** to protect and manage shared water resources.

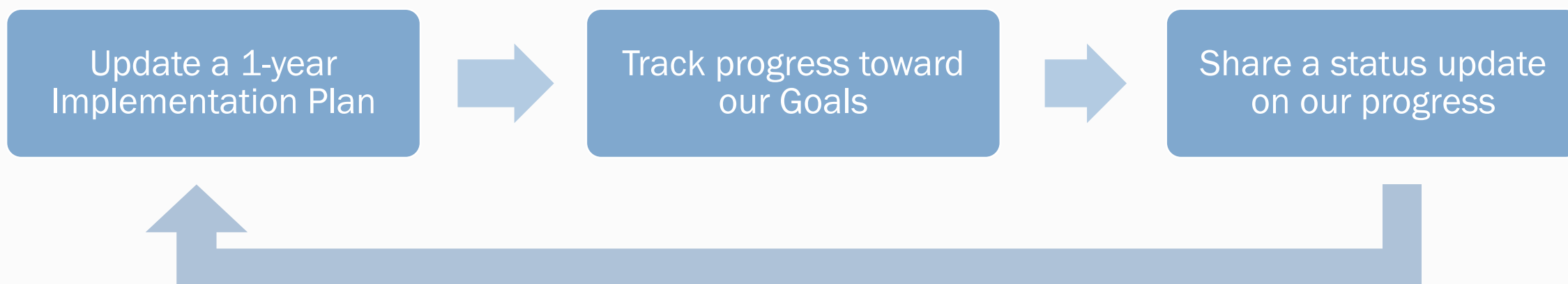
3. Hone Our Organizational Effectiveness

- 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.

Implementation

The ambitions contained in this Strategic Plan are significantly greater than we can achieve with existing resources. We will identify where additional resources are necessary to advance the Plan.

Annual Planning Cycle





Implementation Update: A Progress Check-In

Strategic Plan: FY '25 Implementation Progress

- ✓ **Hiring freeze** reduced overall staff capacity and limited our ability to cross train with retiring staff
- ✓ **Travel freeze** reduced cross-training and team-building opportunities, effected relationships with some water users
- ✓ **Overall budget environment** limited our legislative and budget ambitions

Summary: We made uneven progress fulfilling our strategic priorities due to staffing capacity, mid-year reprioritization, and overall state budget conditions.

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources			
A. Protect instream resources and senior water rights today			
i. Take proactive measures to promote compliance through timely technical assistance, and escalation to enforcement when prior efforts fall short.			
ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable
a	Follow up on information we receive about illegal water use by providing technical assistance, and escalate to formal enforcement when appropriate.	Compliance Staff	
b	Seek funding for FY25-27 biennium for additional watermaster and compliance staff.	Financial Services Section Manager	
c	In collaboration with EAP and OCR, seek funding to increase the number of Ecology-maintained stream gauges.	Financial Services Section Manager	
d	Identify ground-water users in the Yakima Basin that don't have metering provisions and send orders to them.	CRC Lead	
ii. Create clear compliance and enforcement priorities, and effective use of resources.			
ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable
a	Update penalty matrix used to determine civil penalties.		
b	Update compliance policy to reflect current and priorities.		
c	Hold regular compliance team meetings.		
d	Develop an annual workplan and compliance team.		
iii. Evaluate how more advanced			
ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable
a	Collect data and calculate ability and effective calculate ET.		
b	Provide regional cross-training on satellite datasets to support water management, enforcement, and oversight.		
c	Create a complete well location mapping database for Yakima Basin emergency drought wells		
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.			
i. Systematically evaluate climate change impacts on water supplies.			
ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable
a	Seek funding for FY25-27 biennium for evaluation of MAR feasibility, technical challenges, and legal constraints.	Financial Services Section Manager	
b	Seek funding for FY25-27 biennium for refining climate change modeling to improve the capability to project climate change impacts, especially on Western Washington water supplies.	Financial Services Section Manager	Program Manager
ii. Elevate awareness of climate change impacts on water supplies.			
ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable
a	Develop and implement a climate impacts outreach and engagement strategy.	Streamflow Restoration Manager	Program Manager
b	Seek opportunities to present to decision-makers and stakeholders about climate change impacts on water supplies (e.g., legislators, governor's policy staff).	Deputy Program Manager	Program Manager
B. Improve water supply for instream and out-of-stream needs.			
i. Improve resilience to climate change and drought, particularly for overburdened communities and vulnerable populations, by actively engaging with partners in collaborative planning, data analysis, and project implementation.			
ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable
a	Seek permanent funding for drought planning and preparedness grants.	Financial Services Section Manager	Program Manager
b	Continue development of drought rule to file a CR-102.	Statewide Rule Lead	
c	Ensure appropriate policy foundations are in place to allow for the development of a revised statewide water acquisition strategy. Once confirmed, begin revision of the statewide water acquisition strategy.	Streamflow Restoration Section Manager	Policy Support Section Manager
d	Analyze and develop guidance that identifies the factors and specific geographic areas and demographic populations that are overburdened communities and vulnerable populations for water resources, access, and supply.	EJ Lead	Streamflow Restoration Section Manager
ii. Improve resilience to climate change and drought, particularly for overburdened communities and vulnerable populations, by actively engaging with partners in collaborative planning, data analysis, and project implementation.			
ID	Tactic	Responsible	Accountable
a	Collect data and calculate ability and effective calculate ET.		
b	Provide regional cross-training on satellite datasets to support water management, enforcement, and oversight.		
c	Create a complete well location mapping database for Yakima Basin emergency drought wells		

Implementation Planning Underway for FY '26

- ✓ Assess progress on FY 25 implementation plan
- ✓ Explore and understand barriers to implementation
- ✓ Right-size FY 26 implementation plan to promote success
- ✓ Identify actions achievable within existing budget
- ✓ Communicate internally and externally

Performance Indicators

Performance indicators are how we hold ourselves accountable and understand our progress toward the Goals outlined in our Strategic Plan. In the interest of maintaining a reasonable number of indicators to evaluate, these performance indicators are organized by Goal level rather than being attached to specific Tactics. They are intended to remain largely static throughout the lifetime of the Strategic Plan, though we anticipate that future updates will be needed to reflect changes to new and emerging internal and external factors.

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources

Performance Indicator	Desired average
1. Number of new formal enforcement actions taken to achieve compliance	5
2. Number of water right decisions made total for all regions (both New Applications and Change Applications) ²	300
3. Percent of metered water users submitting an annual report ²	50%
4. Percent of high hazard dams inspected	50%
5. Percent of significant hazard dams inspected	35%
6. Percent of water rights mapping completed statewide	77%
7. Median number of (business) days to respond to adjudication queries	5
8. Response rate within timeline in MOU with Department of Health of water system plans and other Department of Health related plans reviewed	95%
9. Percent of water supply wells inspected in delegated counties	70%

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

Performance Indicator	Desired average
1. Percent of drought planning and preparedness grants awarded in overburdened communities and populations	100%
2. Quantity of water providing streamflow benefits through grants issued or direct acquisition by Ecology	800-acre ft./year ²

Goal 3. Hone Our Organizational Effectiveness

Performance Indicator	Desired average
1. Percent of positions we recruit as in-training positions	20%
2. Percent of staff with developmental assignments	5%
3. Percent of staff who indicate "my supervisor is a good leader" in staff survey	80%

1. The agency allocates surface and ground water to meet the state's many water supply needs. Ecology staff makes decisions on applications for new water rights, changes to existing water rights, and by participating in water rights adjudications in areas where additional certainty is needed.

2. This is based on the percentage of water users that have been issued a metering order in one of the 18 fish critical basins.

3. The 800-acre ft./year target for Goal 2's Performance Indicator 2, represents the first time Ecology has attempted to meaningfully quantify the streamflow benefits of our grants and acquisitions. Therefore, an adaptive management approach will be undertaken over the next several reporting cycles to better understand and refine the appropriate target amount of water. The calculation relied upon for this initial estimate of 800 = ((\$20M per year x 30% of transactions with quantifiable results) / \$10k per acre ft. per year). Additionally, reporting of results will be on an annualized basis given that grant and acquisition cycles do not align with OFM's reporting cycle.

FY 25 Implementation Plan Highlights

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources

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

Goal 3. Hone Our Organizational Effectiveness

Implement integrated solutions to Protect Instream Resources

- Awarded over \$50 million in grants to improve stream flows
- Launched pilot drought preparedness and planning grant program
- Completed Walla Walla Legislative report

Manage Water Rights

- On track to outpace previous 5 years in total number of water right decisions – significant progress in Eastern and Northwest regions
- Adopted administrative order to establish Pasco Basin groundwater subarea boundaries to support joint management and rulemaking
- Advanced WRIA 1 adjudication (served 30,000+ potential water users in the watershed, fielded 2,000+ calls and emails)



FY 25 Implementation Plan Highlights

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources

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

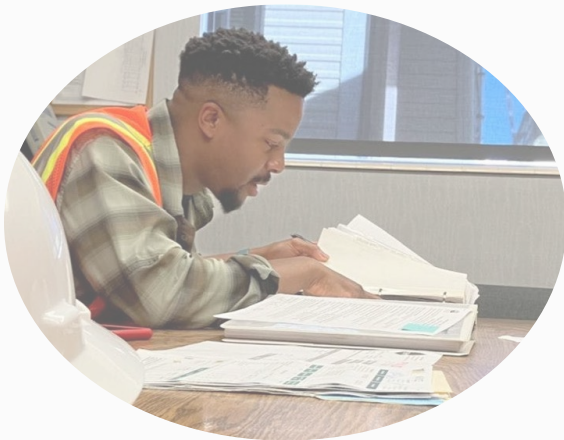
Goal 3. Hone Our Organizational Effectiveness

Promote compliance with water laws

- Updated the Municipal Water Law and Trust Water Rights Program policies
- Made significant progress on penalty matrix update

Provide water resources data and information

- Launched a Nooksack Adjudication web map tool to assist water users in collecting information for the WRIA 1 water rights adjudication
- Created an online submittal option for new water rights application
- Updated the water resources web map to help the public understand water availability across the state



FY 25 Implementation Plan Highlights

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources

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

Goal 3. Hone Our Organizational Effectiveness

Ensure dam safety

- Updated operation & maintenance plans for most significant/high hazard dams

Regulate well construction

- Brought in new counties to well delegation program
- Filled all regional well construction coordinator roles





Ecology Strategic Plan

The Water Resources Program in Context

2025–2030 Strategic Plan

PUBLICATION 24-01-004



Goal 4

Protect and manage our state's waters

Climate change and our state's growing population present increasing challenges in water quantity, quality, and access. We promote climate resiliency and ensure high-quality water resources for people, aquatic species, and ecological systems. We conduct research, gather and assess data, and make investments to restore, protect, and enhance our state's waters now and for future generations.

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DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY WATER RESOURCES PROGRAM STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2029

PLAN OVERVIEW

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

Goal 1. Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources

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

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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.

Partnership and Collaboration

Any meaningful progress toward addressing climate change and environmental injustice will require broad collaboration across the diverse public, tribal, and private players in our state. As we carry out the Goals, Objectives, and Strategies in this Strategic Plan, we look forward to working alongside our sister agencies, Tribes, local governments, and other partners.

Publication 24-11-022


Department of Ecology Water Resources Program Strategic Plan 2025 - 2029

December 2024

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Ecology Strategic Plan: Goal 4.1





Goal 4 Objectives

Protect and manage our state's waters

► **4.1 Increase and preserve access to water for fish, wildlife, and municipal, domestic, and agricultural needs.**

Initiatives:

- A. Reduce the time it takes to process water right applications so that people and businesses get more timely answers, and we better protect the environment.
- B. Increase water availability in the Columbia River Basin for municipal, domestic, and agricultural purposes and promote water exchanges, improved efficiencies, and alternative water supplies.*
- C. Expand how reclaimed water can be used to encourage water reuse, increase water availability, and adapt to a changing climate.*
- D. Initiate improvements to how we manage water resources data and increase data transparency. This includes linking water rights and water use data and improving our public mapping tools.
- E. Legally decide who has water rights (through adjudication) in Water Resource Inventory Area 1, the Nooksack Watershed. This will provide certainty and support the economy and natural environment.

* Indicates initiatives that relate to Ecology-led actions in Washington's Climate Resilience Strategy

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Ecology Strategic Plan: Goal 4.3



Goal 4 Objectives

Protect and manage our state's waters

► 4.3 Improve floodplains, wetlands, watersheds, streamflow, and riparian habitats.

Initiatives:

- A. We will establish a new permitting process to allow landowners and developers to work or build within state waters, including wetlands. This includes mitigating impacts to wetlands and ensuring best management practices are used for other waters.
- B. Support projects that improve riparian management and fish habitat and build community resilience by providing technical and financial assistance to:
 - Remove fish barriers.
 - Accelerate water quality clean-up plans.
 - Improve stream conditions.
 - Reduce hard bank stabilization practices.
 - Support salmon recovery.
 - Update flood and risk maps.*
- C. Continue implementing the [Chehalis Basin Strategy](#) by working with local governments, Tribes, private landowners, and other interested parties to reduce flood-related damage and bolster aquatic species restoration in the Chehalis River basin.*
- D. Fund easements and property acquisitions to benefit aquatic species, protect working lands, and reduce flood damage.*
- E. Increase metering and watermaster staffing to actively manage water use, improve resilience to climate change impacts, and ensure water rights holders are complying with state laws.*

* indicates initiatives that relate to Ecology-led actions in Washington's Climate Resilience Strategy



Dept. of Ecology Strategic Plan: Implementation Update

Goal	Initiative Description	Progress
4.1.A	Reduce the time it takes to process water right applications so that people and businesses get more timely answers, and we better protect the environment.	In-Progress
4.1.C	Expand how reclaimed water can be used to encourage water reuse, increase water availability, and adapt to a changing climate.*	Deferred until FY27
4.1.D	Initiate improvements to how we manage water resources data and increase data transparency. This includes linking water rights and water use data and improving our public mapping tools.	Delayed
4.1.E	Legally decide who has water rights (through adjudication) in Water Resource Inventory Area 1, the Nooksack Watershed. This will provide certainty and support the economy and natural environment.	In-Progress
4.3.E	Increase metering and watermaster staffing to actively manage water use, improve resilience to climate change impacts, and ensure water rights holders are complying with state laws.*	Deferred until FY27



A Look Ahead

Fiscal Year 2026 and Beyond

Impacts of Budget Reductions

Water Resources Program must reduce budget by \$1.6 million in FY 25-27, a loss in capacity and FTE.

- ✓ Staffing reductions
- ✓ Work reprioritization and lowered ambition
- ✓ Doing less with less
- ✓ Double down on investments core in work

...and it could have been a whole lot worse!



Thank you

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