



The Rising Cost of Clean Water

Snohomish County Public Works  Surface Water Management

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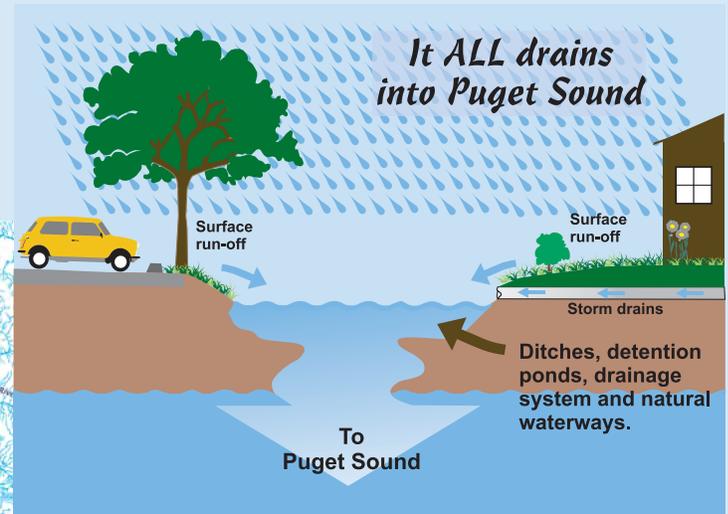
www.snoco.org, search "Surface Water"

Snohomish County is responsible for building and maintaining the public drainage system that carries runoff from roads and developed areas into natural waterways. This system includes roadside ditches, pipes, detention ponds, catch basins, and storm drains.

As the provider of this service, the County operates under a permit called the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) municipal stormwater permit. This permit requires the County to limit pollution leaving its drainage system.

The NPDES permit is based in the Federal Clean Water Act. These permits were initially developed to regulate wastewater treatment plants and industrial discharges. In 1987, amendments to the Clean Water Act expanded the NPDES permit system to include stormwater discharges from cities and counties.

Beginning in 2008, Snohomish County's cost of complying with the revised permit increased by more than \$5 million annually. This increased cost combined with a variety of local economic factors made it necessary for the County to reexamine how it will fund Surface Water Management (SWM) services in the future. To ensure sufficient revenues to meet permit obligations and deliver essential services to county residents, the County is increasing the annual SWM fee charged to property owners.



A GIS-generated map showing mapped waterways in Snohomish County. All human development is unavoidably close to some part of the County's natural water system.

Water Quality

One of the major causes of declining water quality in Snohomish County is non-point source pollution – pollution that can't be pinpointed to one direct location such as a sewer or factory discharge pipe. Non-point source pollution is the widespread accumulation of natural and human-made pollutants that are carried by runoff from rainfall or snowmelt, including:

- Oil, grease and toxic chemicals from roads and urban areas.
- Bacteria and micro-organisms from animal wastes and poorly maintained septic systems.

- Excess fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides from agricultural, industrial, commercial and residential areas.
- Silt from poorly managed construction, agriculture, forestry, and mining sites, and from eroding stream banks.

During the past two decades, non-point source pollution in Snohomish County has worsened, in part, as a result of intensive land-clearing and construction of impervious surfaces – primarily pavement, roads, and rooftops – that have accompanied rapid population growth.

NPDES Permit Requirements

Under its NPDES municipal stormwater permit, Snohomish County is required to implement a variety of actions that include:

- Controlling runoff from new development.
- Constructing stormwater treatment facilities to clean up pollution from existing development.
- Inspecting the County’s stormwater drainage system to find pollution, locate the sources, and take measures to stop the pollution.

In 2009, additional requirements include:

- Increasing inspection and maintenance of drainage facilities including ditches, pipes and catch basins that convey stormwater.
- Increasing inspection and maintenance of County roadways and on County-owned property such as road maintenance facilities, the fairgrounds in Monroe, and Paine Field Airport.
- Providing technical assistance to certain private-sector development activities.
- Providing incentives and assistance to land-owners to reduce non-point source pollution.
- Implementing a business-inspection program to detect sources of pollution, develop control measures and provide technical assistance to business owners.
- Implementing additional stormwater monitoring projects to measure results of compliance efforts.

To learn more about the provisions and requirements of the County’s NPDES permit, visit www.snoco.org and enter “NPDES” in the Search box.

The Surface Water Management Utility Fee

The cost of providing Surface Water Management services, including NPDES compliance, is met by a variety of revenue sources including real-estate excise taxes (REET), federal and state grants, other County revenues and the SWM utility fee. The SWM fee is collected with the annual property taxes paid by property owners in most unincorporated areas of the county. The amount of the fee is set by ordinance adopted by the Snohomish County Council.

In addition to complying with federal clean water regulations, the SWM fee helps fund a variety of ongoing County projects and programs including salmon recovery, flood management, water quality, drainage system construction and maintenance.

Largely due to the dramatic increase in federal clean water requirements, the County determined that a significant increase in the SWM utility fee was needed to maintain essential services as well as to fund mandatory new NPDES compliance work.



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Why The Fee Increase Is Needed Now

The annexation by cities of many unincorporated areas where County fees are now collected is expected to occur during the next two years, causing a considerable reduction in County revenues. Annexation of these areas will not, however, decrease the County’s NPDES compliance costs appreciably. This means that a fewer number of county rate-payers will share the rising cost of SWM services. The fee increase reflects that adjustment.

To defer a fee increase to property owners for as long as possible, the County previously supplemented SWM revenues with contributions from the Division’s reserves to meet NPDES requirements and to sustain existing programs. However, because of the steep increase in new NPDES costs, and because other historical revenue sources have declined, it is no longer possible to offset operating deficits by dipping into reserves.

The 2008 SWM fees were the lowest in the region. No inflationary adjustments have been made since 2001. The new fees will be comparable to many other jurisdictions in the Puget Sound region and will remain considerably less than some.

SWM Fee Rate Schedules

There are two different rate schedules for SWM fees. The amount of the SWM fee is higher inside Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) than in non-UGA areas of the County. Fees within UGAs are higher to pay for the design and construction of drainage projects that are more often needed in urban areas. The table below shows the 2008 and the new 2009 SWM fee rates for single family residential properties.

In 2009, the SWM fees will fully fund NPDES compliance activities, estimated at \$7 million, and about 50% of SWM’s other programs and projects. The remaining 50% will be funded by a combination of grants, existing real-estate taxes, and other revenues.



	Previous 2008	New 2009
SWM Fee Per Residence*	\$33	\$90
Revenue Generated By Fee	\$9.1 mil	\$17.7 mil

* Residences inside the county’s Urban Growth Areas pay an additional \$32 for urban flooding projects outlined in the Snohomish County Drainage Needs Report.

How The Fees Are Calculated

1. The dollar amount charged each property is based on the parcel's land-use classification (i.e. single family residential, condominium, commercial business, etc.) or percentage of impervious surface area.
2. Owners of single-family residences pay a flat fee. This new fee is \$90 outside of UGAs and \$122 per year within UGAs.
3. Condominium and farm fees will increase proportionately, although their rates are lower than single family residential.
4. Commercial and multiple-family properties pay higher fees based on the percentage of impervious surface area. Impervious surfaces are hard surfaces, such as rooftops, driveways, parking lots and gravel areas that prevent or slow down the absorption of water into the soil and increase runoff. These fees will also increase proportionately. For example, a one-acre business with 40% to 60% impervious surfaces that currently pays \$220 per year will see its fees increase to \$600 per year outside UGAs, and increase from \$433 to \$813 inside UGAs.
5. Parcels with in UGAs pay higher fees for the design and construction of urban projects where stormwater management is more intensive.

Some Property Owners Are Exempt From SWM Fees

1. Low-income seniors and disabled persons are exempt from the fees.
2. Public and private schools located in certain areas receive credits to offset the fees in return for teaching about water resources.
3. Undeveloped lands & forest/open space timber lands are exempt from fees and from the fee increase.
4. Commercial and multi-family residential properties with on-site detention facilities receive a reduction in the fees.
5. Farms within Diking, Drainage and Flood Control Districts are exempt from fees in almost all cases (only 24 of 1,681 parcels currently pay fees).

6. Dairies and farms with implemented farm plans in the Stillaguamish district receive exemptions from about 50% of the fees.
7. Nonprofit cemeteries receive full or partial exemptions.

Snohomish County's SWM Fees Compared To Other Jurisdictions

The table below compares Snohomish County's 2008 and new 2009 SWM fee with other counties and cities in the state. The 2008 SWM fee was among the lowest in the Puget Sound Region.

	high
Redmond	\$199
Seattle* (5000-7000 sf lot)	\$179
Kirkland	\$170
Tacoma*	\$161
Everett	\$154
Issaquah	\$148
Stanwood	\$147
Bellevue (7200 sf lot)	\$139
Auburn	\$138
Shoreline	\$124
Snohomish County UGA* New	\$122
Pierce County* (limit)	\$119
Lake Forest Park	\$118
King County*	\$111
Bothell	\$110
Monroe	\$108
Lake Stevens	\$104
Edmonds	\$ 99
Marysville	\$ 96
Mukilteo	\$ 94
Snohomish County Non-UGA* New	\$ 90
Mountlake Terrace	\$ 85
Bellingham (2000 sf SFR)	\$ 84
Lynnwood	\$ 70
Snohomish County UGA* 2008	\$ 65
Spokane County (high)	\$ 63
Kitsap County	\$ 62
Arlington	\$ 41
Skagit County	\$ 36
Snohomish County Non-UGA * 2008	\$ 33
Clark County	\$ 33
	low

* NPDES Phase 1. Others Phase 2, except Stanwood. Pierce County proposes \$22 NPDES surcharge for SFR.