

SOAP Action Update

Lakewise Outreach Program



Snohomish County is home to dozens of lakes which offer stunning views, recreational opportunities, and valuable habitat for aquatic wildlife. While many people live near lakes to enjoy them, these surrounding residential areas can increase the pollution flowing into lakes, particularly nutrient pollution. More nutrients, particularly phosphorus and nitrogen, threaten the health of these sensitive waterbodies. Fortunately, there are many actions that lake area residents can take to prevent nutrient pollution and protect the health of lakes. This is the focus of the new county outreach program—LakeWise—piloted from late-2012 to 2014.

LakeWise is a voluntary program managed by Snohomish County Public Works where lake watershed residents are encouraged to implement up to ten actions (called the Clear Choices Checklist) to protect lake water quality. The actions range from picking up pet wastes to avoiding lawn fertilizers to properly maintaining septic systems. The LakeWise program provides free septic system and natural lawn care workshops, individual site visits from an expert who provides technical advice, and other incentives to help landowners.

When property owners complete the checklist, their properties become “LakeWise Certified”. The LakeWise program recognizes certified properties by awarding an attractive yard sign that showcases landowner commitment and raises neighborhood awareness.

Since late-2012, 135 households in Snohomish County have participated, including public attendance at 9 workshops, and 52 site visits by county staff. Currently there are 18 fully certified properties awarded LakeWise signage, and 29 properties in progress toward receiving certification.

environmental goals

Snohomish County is working to achieve the ecological preservation and healthy ecosystem goals established in our internal Sustainable Operations Action Plan (SOAP) for government operations. Partnering with lake watershed residents through the LakeWise program is one example of how we are taking action to achieve our SOAP goals and objectives, namely:

- **Goal 6:** Promote ecological preservation and healthy ecosystems
- **Objective 6T:** Protect water resources and watershed from actions that can degrade water quality.

environmental benefits

During the pilot phase of LakeWise, 137 households made one or more LakeWise Clear Choices resulting in . . .

- Prevention of an estimated 200 lbs. of phosphorus pollution.
- Prevention of an estimated 300 lbs. of nitrogen pollution.¹
- Reduction in bacterial contamination, pesticides, and other pollutants.

economic case

Preventing lake pollution also makes good economic sense. Once a lake is overloaded with phosphorus and nitrogen, in-lake treatments to clean up a lake can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.²

The fishing, boating, and environmental tourism industry is an important component of the health and vitality of Snohomish County and depends on clean lakes with healthy aquatic life.

1. Calculated using the WA Department of Ecology, Lake Loma Phosphorus Screening-Level Assessment. 2013. publication no. 13-03-031 and related references.
2. Based on costs for area lakes including Lake Stevens, Green Lake, and Lake Ketchum.