



SKAGIT COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
1800 CONTINENTAL PLACE
MOUNT VERNON, WA 98273-5625

Postal Customer Address

CLEAN WATER IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

We need YOUR help to clean up the Samish River

Resources Available to You Get FREE and friendly help!

Skagit Conservation District

- ◆ FREE temporary fencing
- ◆ Farm planning
- ◆ Best management practices
- ◆ Cost share
- ◆ Native plants
- ◆ Stormwater management

<http://www.skagitcd.org>

Natural Resources Stewardship Program

FREE grant funds to:

- ◆ fence out livestock
- ◆ remove invasive plants
- ◆ Replant native plants

<http://www.skagitcounty.net/NRSP>

Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group

- ◆ FREE visit to assess fish habitat needs & concerns
- ◆ Assistance with finding funds for barrier culvert removal/repair
- ◆ Replanting riparian areas with native plants
- ◆ Information on salmon in your stream watershed

<http://www.skagitfisheries.org/>

FREE Classes & Events

Salish Sea Stewards Training

Thursdays, March 5-April 30,
3-6pm at Padilla Bay Research Reserve

Learn how the Salish Sea is different than Puget Sound in 40 hours of classroom and field-based training taught by local and regional experts. Topics include Salish Sea ecosystems, human interactions, current issues, ongoing recovery efforts, and how you can make a difference as a volunteer! Registration required: 360-428-1559 or rsrussell@padillabay.gov.

Backyard Conservation Stewardship Short Course

Wednesdays, March 23-April 27,
6-8:30pm

Learn the principles of how to create beautiful landscapes that benefit humans, animals, stream health, and the environment. One backyard at a time! Registration required. Contact Kristi

Carpenter at 360-428-4313 or kristi@skagitcd.org

Septic Systems 101 - In person or online!

Learn the basics of owning and operating your septic system to keep it working well for as long as possible. Keeping your septic system working well will save you money and help to keep surface and groundwater quality clean.

<http://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/HealthEnvironmental/septic101.htm>

Taylor Shellfish-Tival

Wednesday, July 20th 11-3pm
Free family day at Taylor Shellfish Farm! There will be many fun activities including low tide beach walks, shell art, watershed game, toss the turd game, a kids beach, and lots more!

Clean Samish Initiative

SKAGIT COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS

WINTER/SPRING 2016

5 Things You Can Do for Clean Water

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **March through June** is the critical period when the Washington Department of Health reevaluates water quality and will decide whether to upgrade our local shellfish beds.
- **Even if your property is not next to a creek, stormwater runoff flowing into ditches from your property can carry bacteria to Samish Bay.**

Many Samish residents are already making changes on their property to protect water quality. There are many things you can do to improve water quality. Here are the 5 most important things you can do for clean water:

1. Be responsible for proper septic system maintenance, and make repairs when necessary. If you have questions about your septic system (such as where it is and how to maintain it), contact the Skagit County Health Department at 360-416-1555.
2. Keep livestock away from waterways. If you have livestock, the Skagit Conservation District can help you



All septic systems require maintenance!

manage your pasture and manure in ways that will improve pasture productivity and protect water quality. Contact them at 360-428-4313.

3. Pick up after pets. The poop from just 2 medium sized dogs is potent enough to pollute an Olympic sized swimming pool. Scoop the poop, bag it, and place it in the trash.
4. Plant or preserve trees and native vegetation along creeks, sloughs and the shoreline. These will help filter out pollution before it gets into water.
5. Attend workshops and neighborhood meetings, and talk to your friends and neighbors about what you are doing for clean water! Sharing your successes is the best way for others to see how easy it can be to keep our waterways safe and clean.

Crush the Sewage-Sniffing Dog: Back in Action!



We are pleased to welcome back Crush, the cute, cuddly sewage sniffing superhero!

Last year Crush and her handler, Aryn Herval from Environmental Canine Services, helped Skagit County located human sewage in over a dozen locations.

Crush was given quality control samples in a scent-neutral environment (our

parking lot) to ensure she could positively identify human sewage. Crush was trained to identify samples with human sewage by lying down next to them. She passed the test!

Next, Crush was taken to locations in Skagit County where there was suspicion of high fecal coliform levels. She was able to pinpoint a total of five failing septic systems and six other locations that need further

investigation. Thanks to Crush, these systems have the potential to be fixed or replaced, which will improve Skagit County's water quality.

Crush and her super sewage-sniffing nose will be back in Skagit County in mid-March to locate more potential failing septic systems. Keep an eye out for her!

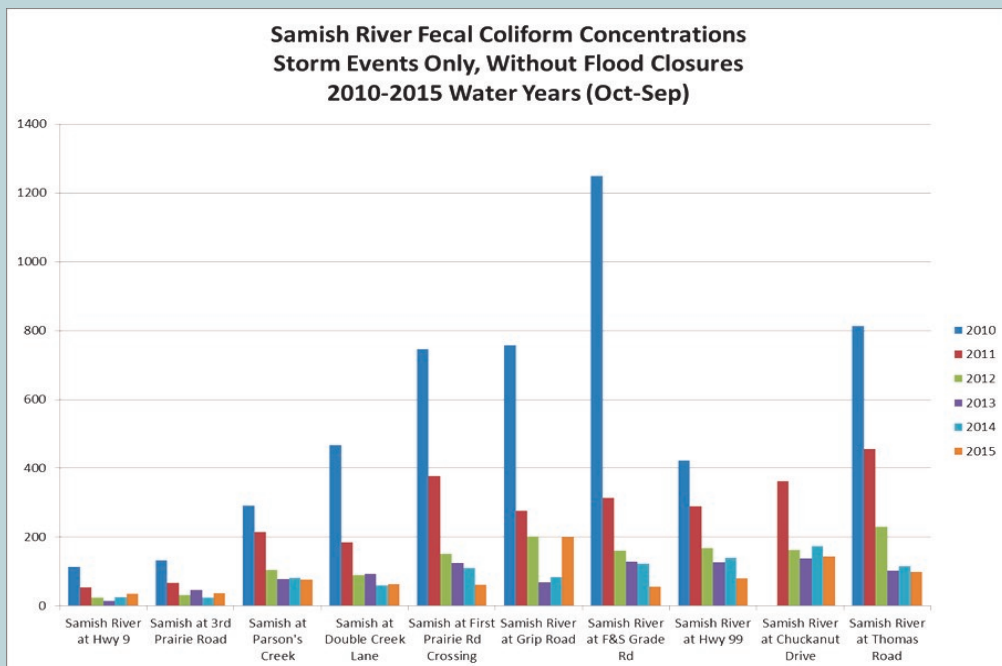
Samish River Water Quality Update

Samish Basin water quality in 2015 was characterized by a continued connection between high rainfall events and increased fecal coliform counts at most stations in the basin, especially in the Samish River and its tributaries. Some of the agricultural drainages showed sporadic high fecal coliform counts in the absence of significant rainfall, but even those stations showed increased counts during rain events.

Skagit County personnel and Storm Team volunteers took over 670 fecal coliform samples in the Samish Basin during 2015. Staff from the Washington State Departments of Ecology and Agriculture took many additional samples. Much of the sampling was associated with the Clean Samish Initiative's 90-Day Intensive Effort (March-May) and was concentrated in the Friday Creek, Samish lower mainstem, and Thomas Creek sub-basins. This sampling was used to guide landowner contact and cleanup activities in those areas.

The figure below shows storm event fecal coliform counts in the mainstem Samish River from upstream to downstream, by water year. 2015 somewhat improved from 2014 in some locations, and showed sustained improvement from 2010 although the pace of progress has slowed since 2013.

In 2015 The Samish Bay Shellfish Growing Area had two flood closures, nine pollution closures, and four occasions where a precautionary storm event closure was rescinded due to low pollution levels.



Fun Facts:

- Oysters and other shellfish are a major industry in Skagit County.



- Today, there are thirteen Washington licensed shellfish companies on Samish Bay.

Why All the Fuss About Shellfish?

The shellfish resources of Samish Bay are one of Skagit County's most historic and treasured resources. The bounty of clams and oysters that flourish on Samish tidelands were an important food source for Native Americans and early settlers and are a local delicacy that many of us enjoy and appreciate today (yum!).

While shellfish provide a nutritious food source and contribute to our economy, they also play a crucial role in maintaining the health of the estuary. Shellfish serve as powerful water filters, habitat for plant and animal life of all kinds, and play an important role in the food web. They also play a particularly important role in the uptake and recycling of energy and nutrients.

The ability to harvest shellfish locally is a clear measure of the health of our rivers and water quality. When shellfish beds, such as those in Samish bay, are closed, it is

an indicator that the health of our upland streams and rivers are also at risk. Fecal coliform pollution is one of the key environmental issues facing our community. Whether your passion is eating fresh local oysters, clams, and mussels, finding them on the beach, or improving the health of our watershed and community, we can all do our part by taking actions in our own backyard and joining in this local effort to protect water quality and the shellfish resources in the Samish watershed.

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Dairy Farming in the Samish

Spring is just around the corner and Skagit County's farm fields will begin to spring to life. Local dairy producers will be tending to their fields, carefully applying dairy nutrients at the right time and at the right rate to ensure productive crop growth that will provide feed for their animals.

Why put manure on fields?

The manure generated by cows and used as fertilizer supports crop growth. When the crop-manure cycle is in balance, farmers can reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers.

Manure, a hot commodity.

Many organic farms rely on the use of manure nutrients to naturally and sustainably support their crops. Dairy producers may opt to export manure for organic farming, composting or manure share programs. The nutrients generated by dairy farms are valuable and farmers want to

ensure these nutrients applied to the land are not lost by over application. Farmers use information such as soil and nutrient tests, predicted crop yield and weather forecasts to make the most of this resource.

No one said it was easy.

Dairy producers have been leading the clean water effort for many years. Regulated by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), dairy farms are subject to inspections, site visits and water quality monitoring. Dairies are required to keep records of how and when they use manure nutrients, document nutrient tests, annual fall soil tests, and manure exports. WSDA works to ensure dairies are continuing to do their part to protect area resources.

If needed, the WSDA will work with a farm to identify solutions to a potential problem, and provide technical assistance in support of remaining in compliance with water quality

regulations. Staying informed on new regulations and farm practices motivates producers to attend trainings and community and industry meetings. Samish dairy farmers recently met with the WSDA to discuss industry challenges, local concerns and reaffirm the use of practices that aid in protecting the future of farming in Skagit County.

Want to learn more?

Please visit the WSDA Dairy Nutrient Management and the Skagit Conservation District websites for more information. You can also contact WSDA, Technical and Compliance Specialist, Chery Sullivan, at 360-902-1928 with questions or concerns. And of course, you can gain first-hand knowledge by chatting with and learning from your local farmer.



An Interview with Dean Bannister: a Septic Inspector

Why should I get my septic system inspected?

Today system installations and repairs have been known to exceed \$20,000. That amount of money is a major investment for most homeowners. In many cases a major repair may be avoided if minor system problems can be identified early on. A properly working septic system will also be beneficial for the health and safety of your family and help to keep surface and groundwater clean.

How much does an inspection cost?

Inspection fees in Skagit County typically range from \$125.00 to \$300.00 depending on the service provider and the system type. These numbers include travel to and from the site, on-site system inspection and possible maintenance, and completing the online inspection report required by Skagit County.

What happens during an inspection?

It depends on the type of system. My typical inspection will include examination of applicable components including the septic tank, pump tank, and drain field. In all systems I would be observing the entire site for evidence of surfacing effluent, wetter areas, and groundwater influence upon the drain field along with effluent discharge to ditches or other surface water.

What happens if you find a problem?

Many inspections reveal minor issues with system function. Typically these can be fixed while on the site by minor adjustment. Other times, a component will need to be replaced. We will advise the property owner of the problem, give a rough quote of the cost to fix it, and rig the system to operate in one fashion or another until we can make the repair. If we have done minor fixes we will report them with no further action by the county. If the system is failing it will require soil and site evaluation and repair design.

Septic Inspection Rebates Are Returning!

Skagit County's Public Health Department will soon be offering \$100 rebates to help with the cost of inspecting your septic system. Keep an eye on their homepage. Rebate forms will be posted as soon as they are available. <http://skagitcounty.net/Departments/HealthEnvironmental/onsitesewer.htm>

Financial Assistance for Septic System Repair/Replacement

If you can't afford to repair or replace your septic system, Skagit County offers grants and loans to help you. Contact the Environmental Public Health Department at 360-416-1555.