

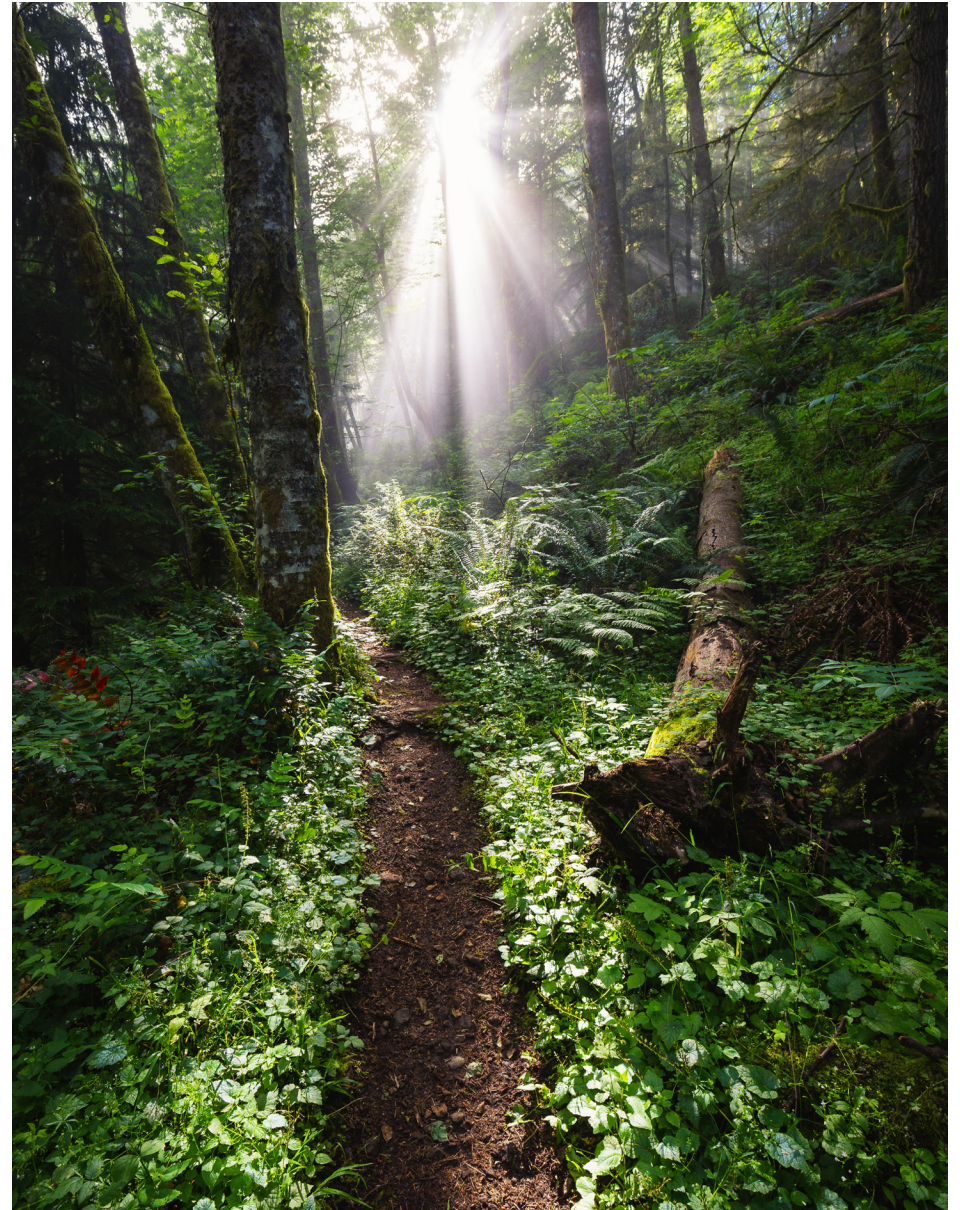
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY WATER RESOURCES PROGRAM STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2029



DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

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FOUNDATIONS



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 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.

A long-exposure photograph of a waterfall cascading over dark, mossy rocks into a pool of water. The water appears as a soft, white veil. In the foreground, large, flat, light-colored rocks are partially submerged. A horizontal bar with three segments of different colors (blue, green, and teal) is positioned at the top of the image.

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.

IMPLEMENTATION



Resources

The ambitions contained in this plan are significantly greater than we can achieve with existing resources. Through our annual planning cycle, we will identify what we can accomplish with existing resources and where additional staff capacity, or other resources, are necessary to advance specific Goals, Objectives, and Strategies.

Annual Planning Cycle

Over the five-year span of this Strategic Plan, we will follow a consistent annual implementation process, using the key steps outlined below.



Looking Ahead

While the planning horizon for this Strategic Plan is five years, our Vision, Mission, and Values provide durable, long-term guidance far beyond this timeframe. After the five-year timeframe of this Strategic Plan, we will develop an updated or new Plan to guide our work in the coming years. That Plan may retain some Goals and Objectives included in this plan that may take longer than 5 years to complete.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES



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

- 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.
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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.
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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.

Goal 1.

Actively Manage Our State's Water Resources



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

- i. Take proactive measures to promote compliance through timely technical assistance, voluntary compliance, and escalation to enforcement when prior efforts fall short.
- ii. Create clear compliance and enforcement priorities and processes to promote consistency, defensibility, and effective use of resources.
- iii. Evaluate how more advanced technology can assist on-the-ground water management and oversight.
- iv. 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.

- i. Initiate and maintain ongoing support for adjudication in target basin(s).
- ii. 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.

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

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

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

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. Systemically evaluate climate change impacts on water supplies.
 - ii. Elevate awareness of climate change impacts on water supplies.
- 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.
 - ii. Promote projects in target basins in collaboration with watershed partners for large-scale intensive planning efforts.
- C. Promote reforms to state water law to increase the resilience of our state's water resources to climate change.**
 - i. Seek legislation to modernize the water code to better and more equitably manage water resources in the face of climate change impacts.
 - ii. Evaluate and, if needed, seek additional authority to advance water conservation measures and more efficient use of existing water resources.
 - iii. Engage legislators regarding State water law and related implementation challenges.

Partnership with Tribes

The unique status of Indian Tribes, including their unquantified and quantified senior treaty-reserved rights and cultural interests throughout the state, create a special and critically important relationship between Tribes and our organization. In recognition of this important relationship, Water Resources Program is committed to early and ongoing consultation with Tribes. We cooperate with Tribes in a government-to-government relationship to protect and manage shared water resources within the state, and we adhere to the spirit and intent of the Centennial Accord between the Federally Recognized Indian Tribes in Washington State and the State of Washington.

Goal 3.

Hone Our Organizational Effectiveness



A. Cultivate a work environment that supports and retains staff.

- i. Promote a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and respectful environment through our hiring practices, program communications, and organizational culture.
- ii. Advance our ability to meet staff organizational needs in a hybrid environment.
- iii. Improve leadership competencies by ensuring our program leaders have the training, skills, and support they need.

B. Promote staff professional development.

- i. Improve onboarding processes and tools, including section-specific resources.
- ii. Establish developmental assignments and in-training positions to support career growth, promote cross-training, and create mentorship opportunities.
- iii. Identify internal and external professional development and training opportunities and support staff participation (e.g., regarding use of new technology, conflict resolution, media engagement, etc.).
- iv. Support ongoing collaboration and communication among staff, including from different sections, through “job-alike” meetings and trainings.

C. Ensure our processes and procedures are timely, effective, and consistent statewide.

- i. Build on formalized institutional knowledge to develop and update procedures, manuals, guidance, and other tools.
- ii. Regularly evaluate our formal program policies and rules to ensure they remain current and relevant.
- iii. Increase permit timeliness through additional staff resources and other measures.

D. Invest in information technology to meet current and future data needs.

- i. Leverage agency investment in electronic content management systems to evaluate and invest in improved program-level data management.
- ii. Plan for and develop a single data hub for water rights and water management data, available both internally and publicly, to improve access, transparency, functionality, and the user experience.
- iii. Provide ongoing staff training in new information systems and technologies.

