

Snohomish County

Surface Water Management Utility Consolidation FAQ

Why are you proposing this change now?

- We want to improve efficiency and effectiveness for ratepayers. Managing three separate revenue districts is inefficient. It costs money and time that could be better spent on services. Consolidating into a countywide utility district will reduce administrative overhead.
- This is the first step of a business planning process aimed at becoming more efficient and transparent.
- The demand for services is always greater than the available resources. We want to be good stewards of public funds. Recent changes in accounting rules and uncollected accounts receivable increased the strain on our budget.
- The cost to comply with state and federal requirements, such as the NPDES permit, keeps going up every year, while SWM rates have been held constant for nine years.
- Executive Somers launched a Service, Technology, and Excellence Program (STEP) encouraging all departments to look for ways to be more efficient at delivering services.
- State and federal requirements, and many other SWM services, are not specific just to a given Watershed Management area. A countywide utility district reflects the countywide nature of SWM services.

Would one area of the County need more services than another – yet pay same amount?

- No. SWM will continue to collect the same fees countywide as we do today, and continue to provide services in all areas of the county. Thanks to our ability to leverage grant funds, SWM invests more in each area of the county than we collect in SWM charges.
- Through consolidation SWM can reduce administrative costs by \$480,000. These savings can be reinvested to improve services.

Will rates go up with this approach?

- No. The consolidation into a countywide district is not a rate increase. It is an effort to become more efficient, transparent, flexible, and ensure equitable levels of service.
- Later this year SWM will develop a Business Plan to set the path for future SWM services and funding needs.

Will the use of UGA surcharge fees be changed?

- No, UGA surcharge fees will continue to address drainage and water quality issues in the UGA.

How would ratepayers' needs and concerns be identified and acknowledged by SWM in the Stillaguamish River Basin?

- SWM is dedicated to maintaining communication with its ratepayers across the County, including the Stillaguamish River Basin. Under the proposed consolidation, SWM will increase transparency through annual reports and encourage citizen engagement with increased opportunities to provide feedback and input on priorities.
- Surface Water Management (SWM) is developing a Utility Business Plan to set the path for future SWM services, levels of service, revenues, and utility rates. There will be opportunities to have the public provide input in this process. SWM is currently seeking a consultant to facilitate the process and is expected to begin in May 2017 and complete the business plan by December 2017.
- SWM also provides many opportunities for ratepayers to share issues, priorities and concerns, including staffed drainage and water quality complaint hotlines, watershed stewardship, public meetings, lake volunteer program, and community training opportunities such as septic care workshops, and natural yard care.
- SWM will be reviewing the scope and project types for the discretionary fund program to implement as a countywide program in 2017. SWM will be seeking input from the public so there will be opportunities to have the public weigh in on the scope and types of projects. More information will be posted to SWM's website when it becomes available.
- In 2017 the County will be holding its first annual NPDES stormwater management plan workshop ([NPDES Workshop Information](#)), which is an example of how SWM will be working hard to engage with ratepayers countywide.

The discretionary fund in the CWD is used to support and assist private landowners, community groups, and/or local agencies in undertaking small-scale projects to improve water quality on private or public property, will this program continue?

- Under the proposed consolidation the county will continue a small grant program and expand it countywide to provide this valuable opportunity to all ratepayers.
- SWM will be reviewing the scope and project types for the discretionary fund program to implement as a countywide program in 2017. SWM will be seeking input from the public so there will be opportunities to have the public weigh in on the scope and types of projects. More information will be posted to SWM's website when it becomes available.

Will the fund balances for the Snohomish Conservation District and the discretionary fund be preserved?

- If the ordinance is approved funds collected for the Stillaguamish CWD, Snohomish Conservation District, and the CWD discretionary fund will be maintained and expended for the purpose in which they were originally collected.

When will this go into effect? What is process for review, approval, etc.?

- SWM has sent proposed changes to the Executive and County Council for their consideration.
- The County Council is expected to hold a public hearing to discuss consolidating the service areas into a single utility.
- If approved, the change will take effect in the coming months.

Will the residents have opportunity to voice their opinion, etc.?

- Yes, the Snohomish County Council will hold a public hearing to discuss consolidating the service areas into a single utility. This is the opportunity for residents to comment on the proposed changes.
- The public hearing will be advertised via the County Council's website.