



Dave Somers
County Executive

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Contact: Kent Patton
425-388-3883
425-330-1858

Snohomish County Executive Targets Puget Sound Recovery Efforts

Will Be Focus of Dave Somers' Sustainability Efforts

EVERETT, Snohomish County--On Earth Day 2016, Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers announced that expanded efforts to protect and restore Puget Sound will be a center-piece of his Administration. With Snohomish County including such diverse ecosystems—from high mountain passes to forested lands, from rivers to farms, and of course the inland sea of Puget Sound—more attention must be focused on not just maintaining what we have but improving it.

“We have been given responsibility to protect one of the most beautiful regions of the planet. If we want our mountains and rivers, forests and fields to be protected, we must be good stewards of our resources. Puget Sound is one of our region’s most valuable natural assets,” said Somers. “As a fisheries scientist and as someone who loves our natural heritage, I want to ensure this resource is protected for generations to come. Unfortunately, Puget Sound and many of our rivers are in trouble. Today, I am launching an effort to focus even more attention on working toward a healthy Puget Sound. Coordinating with partners across the region and state, we will report every year on progress made and challenges before us. It’s one of the most important things we can do for our community. It’s past time to get Puget Sound on track towards recovery. Our economy and way of life are dependent on our success.”

Despite progress made by Snohomish County and other organizations, Puget Sound is still in trouble. The rate of damage to the environment outpaces the rate of recovery, according to the state agency that oversees Puget Sound cleanup efforts, Puget Sound Partnership (PSP). The PSP’s 2015 *State of the Sound* report found that salmon, herring, and other important species are in decline. Shellfish beds have been closed because water pollution can make the shellfish poisonous. Stormwater runoff in some urban streams is so toxic that salmon die before they can lay their eggs. Some of the problems include pollution from existing sources, inadequate stormwater treatment, and the effects of rapid growth in the region.

“We need to do more and will take steps to reduce water pollution, improve aquatic habitat, and fix culverts so they don’t block salmon,” said Steve Thomsen, Snohomish County’s Public Works Director. “We will begin to accelerate our efforts starting this year.”

In urban areas, rain picks up pollution from roads, parking lots, and other hard surfaces. The runoff from those developed areas carries pollution into rivers, lakes, and Puget Sound. This year, new county regulations to reduce runoff and better clean stormwater drainage from new developments take effect.

“Through a coordinated effort between Snohomish County and our partners, we will maximize our efforts to clean up Puget Sound. We will provide new tools to ensure developments are having minimal impacts on our environment,” Said Barb Mock, Director of Snohomish County’s Planning and Development Services Department.

The new regulations apply to new development. Finding ways to reduce pollution from existing development is one of the challenges that will be addressed. The county already maintains an extensive system for managing stormwater runoff from roads and private property to comply with state permit requirements. This year, the county will extend its maintenance program to improve water quality in areas beyond the state requirements.

“We can clean up Puget Sound by working together as neighbors and as a region. First, we must tackle the problem of polluted runoff from areas that were built before we had any stormwater regulations,” said Executive Somers.

The county is currently developing a pilot program to address existing development runoff. The pilot program will select a small area where runoff from existing roads and development is a major problem. It will test and evaluate different options for reducing pollution, including construction of new stormwater treatment facilities and incentives for improvements on private property. The results of the pilot will determine which techniques are most effective and lead to broader-based approaches.

The county is also increasing its outreach to help individuals reduce pollution at the source. “Everyone can do something to reduce the amount of pollution that enters our rivers and lakes,” according to Will Hall, Snohomish County’s new Director of Surface Water Management. “If we all do our part—fixing oil leaks, scooping up pet waste, and avoiding overuse of fertilizers and pesticides—we can make a real difference in the health of our lakes and Puget Sound.”

In rural areas, farms and stables can often make small changes in their operations to reduce the amount of chemicals and bacterial waste that get into rivers. The county already has programs to help farmers implement water treatment techniques and to help homeowners repair failing septic systems. Starting this summer, Snohomish County will reach out to small businesses to help them comply with state water quality requirements. In partnership with the Snohomish Conservation District, the program will provide information about good practices to prevent pollution from animals and animal waste.

Snohomish County also plans to speed up the replacement of aging drainage infrastructure, especially culverts that block the migration of salmon. “We have already fixed more than 80 barriers to fish passage with funding and support from many partner organizations,” said Thomsen. “We want to speed up this program and fix 50 more high priority culverts in the coming years.”

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