

SNOHOMISH COUNTY SURFACE WATER MANAGEMENT

Business Plan Ratepayer Survey Summary

January 31, 2018

OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Snohomish County Surface Water Management (SWM) is a public utility that provides a variety of services for ratepayers focused on drainage, water quality, aquatic habitat, and floodplain management. SWM is currently in the process of developing a business plan to guide the scope and level of services the utility will provide to ratepayers, as well as identify utility rate recommendations necessary to sustain services and meet all legal requirements.

SWM is seeking ratepayer feedback throughout this process via multiple channels including: a citizen advisory panel, meetings and interviews with stakeholders and partner organizations, a ratepayer survey, public open houses, and a newsletter. This document presents the methodology and key findings related to the ratepayer survey.

Survey invitations were distributed by postal mail. On January 5, 2018, Snohomish County SWM mailed an invitation letter with a weblink to an online version of the survey to 94,736 ratepayers. A total of 4,363 responses received through 11:59 p.m. on January 22 were included in this analysis, representing a 4.6% response rate. Some respondents did not answer all questions; percentages were calculated using responses available. Figures in this report are rounded to the nearest percentage point. As a result, the sum of individual figures may not appear to equal the total or subtotal, but each figure is independently the most accurate rounded amount.

Responses will continue to be accepted through February 21 for future analysis. The survey instrument is presented in Appendix A.

KEY FINDINGS ANALYSIS

This section highlights key findings from the survey. A complete set of tables and charts for overall results is presented in Appendix B.

Awareness of Utility

- Approximately 59% of respondents knew that Snohomish County has a stormwater utility and 31% did not know. Another 10% of respondents were not sure.
 - *Note: these percentages may overestimate awareness as people who were not aware of the utility may have been less likely to respond to the survey.*

Importance of SWM Services

- Each individual SWM service in the survey was rated as very or extremely important by at least 60% of respondents (see Table 1).
- The services rated very or extremely important by the highest share of respondents were:
 - Maintain stormwater drainage systems (84%)
 - Identify and fix water pollution problems (83%)
 - Maintain structures that remove pollution from stormwater (80%)
 - Help residents and businesses prevent water pollution (79%)

Table 1. How important to you is our work to...?

SWM service	Very or extremely important	Moderately important	Slightly or not at all important
Maintain stormwater drainage systems	84%	12%	3%
Identify and fix water pollution problems	83%	11%	5%
Maintain structures that remove pollution from stormwater	80%	13%	6%
Help residents and businesses prevent water pollution	79%	14%	7%
Build projects that reduce local flooding	77%	16%	6%
Build projects to restore rivers, lakes, and streams for fish and wildlife	71%	17%	10%
Maintain a flood warning system	62%	23%	14%
Help residents solve drainage problems on their property	60%	24%	15%

Note: Approximately 1% of respondents selected “not sure” when asked to rate the importance of SWM’s services; as a result, rows in this table do not sum to 100%.

Level of Work in Existing Service Areas

- For each individual SWM service area in the survey related to keeping people safe and water clean, more than 80% of respondents want SWM to do either the same or more work.
- Between 45% and 64% of respondents want SWM to do more work in each individual service area (see Table 2).
- Overall, the service that received the strongest support for doing more work was repairing and replacing aging stormwater drainage infrastructure, in which 64% of respondents thought that SWM should do either a lot more (34%) or a little more (31%) work (see Table 3).

Table 2. Should SWM do less, more, or about the same work in...?

SWM service area	A lot or a little more	About the same	A lot or a little less	Not sure
Repair and replace aging stormwater drainage infrastructure	64%	25%	3%	8%
Keep water healthy for swimming and fishing	54%	33%	4%	8%
Protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat	54%	28%	9%	8%
Reduce local flooding	50%	37%	5%	8%
Reduce impacts of river flooding	45%	39%	7%	10%

Table 3. Should SWM do less, more, or about the same work in...? (Subset of respondents who thought SWM should do more work in service areas)

SWM service area	A little more	A lot more	Total more
Repair and replace aging stormwater drainage infrastructure	31%	34%	64%
Keep water healthy for swimming and fishing	25%	29%	54%
Protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat	22%	32%	54%
Reduce local flooding	26%	23%	50%
Reduce impacts of river flooding	23%	21%	45%

Service Enhancements

Survey respondents were asked to choose their top three priorities for additional investment to enhance SWM services (see Table 4).

- The top two service enhancements prioritized by respondents were:
 - Replace aging drainage pipes before they fail (64%)
 - Increase maintenance of drainage systems to reduce pollution (53%)
- Overall, 11% of respondents thought SWM should make no additional investment in service enhancements.

Table 4. Which of the following would be your top 3 priorities for additional investment?

SWM service enhancement	Percentage
Replace aging drainage pipes before they fail	64%
Increase maintenance of drainage systems to reduce pollution	53%
Speed up work to restore rivers, lakes, and streams for fish and wildlife	37%
Increase work with communities to reduce river flooding and erosion risks	31%
Speed up replacement of culverts that block fish migration	26%
Increase assistance to people doing work on their property to improve the health of rivers, lakes, and streams	26%
Speed up work to improve water quality in shellfish beds	11%
Expand the flood warning system to additional areas	7%
Other	11%
No additional investment	11%

Residential Incentive Program

Survey respondents were asked to identify the types of projects on their property to address drainage problems or prevent water pollution for which they or their neighbors would be interested in receiving financial incentives (see Table 5).

- The top two types of projects selected by respondents related to:
 - Installing green stormwater infrastructure such as rain barrels and rain gardens (50%)
 - Planting trees along rivers, lakes, and streams (47%)
- Overall 19% of respondents said that they and their neighbors would not be interested in financial incentives for any projects on their properties.

Table 5. For what types of projects might you or your neighbors be interested in receiving financial incentives?

Project Type	Percentage
Install rain barrels, rain gardens, pervious pavement, and other ways to reduce and clean stormwater runoff	50%
Plant trees along rivers, lakes, and streams to filter pollution, restore habitat, and prevent erosion	47%
Repair failed septic systems	40%
Manage manure and keep livestock out of streams	23%
Other projects that address drainage problems or prevent water pollution	14%
Not interested in any projects	19%

ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

This section summarizes respondent characteristics regarding property they own in Snohomish County.

- Overall 97% respondents reported owning only residential property in Snohomish County, 2% reported owning both residential and commercial property, and 1% reported only owning commercial property.
- Respondents most commonly reported that the area around their property is suburban (42%), rural (29%), or rural transitioning to suburban (22%). Approximately 7% of respondents reported owning property in an urban area.
- More than half (52%) of respondents reported that their property is not within 200 feet of a natural waterbody. Another 38% of respondents reported owning property within 200 feet of a waterbody, and 10% of respondents were not sure.

- Overall, 99% of respondents reported receiving the survey by postal mail in a zip code within Snohomish County, indicating they live within the county. Collectively, approximately three-quarters of respondents reported receiving the survey in the following zip codes:
 - 98012 (11%)
 - 98290 (11%)
 - 98296 (11%)
 - 98208 (11%)
 - 98223 (7%)
 - 98292 (7%)
 - 98026 (6%)
 - 98087 (6%)
 - 98258 (5%)

Respondent Comparisons by Key Characteristics

This section highlights key differences in survey responses between respondent subgroups based on:

- Ownership of a shoreline property
- Type of area around property (urban, suburban, transitioning, rural)
- Prior awareness of the stormwater utility

Ownership of Shoreline Property

Responses were compared for people who reported owning property within 200 feet of a river, lake, stream, or Puget Sound (shoreline property owners) versus respondents who said their property was not within 200 feet of a natural waterbody. Respondents who did not know whether their property was near a shoreline were excluded from this comparison.

Tables and charts for results by shoreline property ownership are presented in Appendix C.

- Shoreline property owners (64%) were somewhat more likely to know that Snohomish County has a stormwater utility than non-shoreline respondents (59%).
- For all services, shoreline property owners were somewhat more likely to report the services as “extremely” important and were equally or somewhat more likely to report each of the individual services as either “very” or “extremely” important. The largest differences in services considered “extremely” important were:
 - Help residents solve drainage problems on their property (33% of shoreline respondents versus 24% of non-shoreline respondents).
 - Maintain stormwater drainage systems (46% of shoreline respondents versus 39%).
- Shoreline property owners were somewhat more likely to think that SWM should do “a lot more” work on all service areas. (Note: Differences were not statistically significant for “repair and replace aging stormwater drainage infrastructure.”)
 - The largest difference was in “reduce local flooding” (27% of shoreline respondents versus 21%).

- When asked about their priorities for program enhancements, shoreline property owners were:
 - Less likely to prioritize “replace aging drainage pipes before they fail” (57% versus 68%).
 - Somewhat more likely to prioritize “increase assistance to people doing work on their property to improve the health of rivers, lakes, and streams” (30% versus 23%).
 - Somewhat more likely to prioritize “speed up replacement of culverts that block fish migration” (29% versus 25%).
 - Somewhat less likely to say no additional investment is needed to enhance SWM services (10% versus 12%).
- Shoreline property owners were somewhat more likely to be interested in financial incentives for projects to plant trees along shorelines (51% versus 44%) and somewhat less likely to say they and their neighbors were not interested in any projects (15% versus 22%).
- Shoreline property owners were more likely to own property in a rural area (37% versus 23%) or a rural area that is transitioning to suburban (25% versus 21%).

Type of Area Around Property

Responses were compared for people who reported owning property in urban, suburban, transitioning, and rural areas. These percentages are available in the tables and charts for results by area type, which are presented in Appendix D.

- Rural (62%) and transitioning (64%) property owners were somewhat more likely to know that Snohomish County has a stormwater utility than urban (57%) and suburban (57%) property owners were.
- Compared to suburban or urban property owners, property owners in rural or transitioning areas generally rated individual SWM services as being somewhat less important.
- Compared to suburban or urban property owners, property owners in rural or transitioning areas were generally somewhat less likely to say that SWM should do more work to keep people safe and water clean.
- Compared to suburban or urban property owners, property owners in rural or transitioning areas were:
 - Less likely to prioritize replacing aging drainage pipes before they fail (56% rural and 60% transitioning, versus 71% suburban and 68% urban).
 - Somewhat less likely to prioritize increasing maintenance of drainage systems to reduce pollution (45% rural and 51% transitioning versus 60% suburban and 55% urban).
 - Somewhat more likely to prioritize increasing assistance to people doing work on their property to improve the health of rivers, lakes, and streams (29% rural and 30% transitioning versus 22% suburban and 23% urban).
- Compared to property owners in suburban or transitioning areas, property owners in rural areas were:
 - Somewhat more likely to prioritize increasing work with communities to reduce river flooding and erosion risks than residents in other areas (35% rural versus 28% transitioning and 29% suburban).

- Property owners in both urban (25%) and rural areas (21%) were somewhat more likely to report no interest in financial incentives for any projects than property owners in suburban (19%) or transitioning (14%) areas.

Prior Awareness of the Stormwater Utility

Responses were compared for people who reported knowing that Snohomish County has a stormwater utility versus respondents who said they did not know this fact. Respondents who were not sure whether they had known about the utility were excluded from this comparison. Tables and charts for results by prior awareness of the utility are presented in Appendix E.

- Respondents who were aware of the stormwater utility were somewhat less likely to rate some individual SWM services as “extremely” important:
 - Maintain a flood warning system (27% of aware respondents versus 31% of unaware respondents).
 - Help residents solve drainage problems on their property (27% versus 30%).
 - Identify and fix water pollution problems (45% versus 49%).
 - Help residents and businesses prevent water pollution (40% versus 45%).
 - Build projects that restore rivers, lakes, and streams for fish and wildlife (37% versus 43%).
- Regarding enhancements, respondents who were aware of the stormwater utility were:
 - Somewhat more likely to prioritize speeding up replacements of culverts that block fish migration (28% versus 24%).
 - Somewhat less likely to prioritize increasing work with communities to reduce river flooding and erosion risks (29% versus 33%).
- Regarding other characteristics, respondents who were aware of the stormwater utility were:
 - Somewhat more likely to own commercial property (4% versus 1%).
 - Somewhat less likely to describe the area around their property as suburban (40% versus 46%) and somewhat more likely to describe the surrounding area as rural (24% versus 20%).
 - Somewhat more likely to own property within 200 feet of a waterbody (41% versus 34%) and somewhat less likely to be unsure about proximity to a waterbody (8% versus 13%).

Ownership of Commercial versus Residential

Responses were compared for people who reported owning commercial property versus residential property. Respondents who owned both types of property were included in both groups and those who rent or lease only were excluded from this comparison. Tables and charts for results by prior awareness of the utility are presented in Appendix F.

- Commercial property owners (79%) were somewhat more likely to know that Snohomish County has a stormwater utility than residential respondents (60%).

- Commercial property owners were less likely to rate individual SWM services as very or extremely important. The largest differences were in:
 - Maintain structures that remove pollution from stormwater (55% of commercial respondents versus 81% of residential respondents).
 - Identify and fix water pollution problems (61% versus 83%).
 - Help residents and businesses prevent water pollution (56% versus 79%).
 - Build projects to restore rivers, lakes, and streams for fish and wildlife (49% versus 72%).
- Commercial property owners were more likely to think that SWM should do less work in most service areas. The largest differences were in:
 - Protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat (31% of commercial respondents versus 9% of residential respondents).
 - Keep water healthy for swimming and fishing (17% versus 4%)
- When asked about their priorities for program enhancements, commercial property owners were:
 - More likely to say no additional investment is needed (28% of commercial respondents versus 11% of residential respondents).
 - Less likely to prioritize “speed up work to restore rivers, lakes, and streams for fish and wildlife” (21% versus 37%).
 - Less likely to prioritize “increase maintenance of drainage systems to reduce pollution (42% versus 53%).
 - Somewhat more likely to prioritize “expand the flood warning system to additional areas” (14% versus 7%).
- Residential property owners more likely to be interested in financial incentives for projects to install rain barrels, rain gardens, pervious pavement, and other ways to reduce and clean stormwater (51% of residential respondents versus 27% of commercial respondents).
- Commercial property owners were:
 - Somewhat more likely to own property in an urban area (13% of commercial respondents versus 6% of residential respondents).
 - Less likely to own property in a suburban area (26% versus 42%).
 - More likely to own property within 200 feet of a waterbody (55% versus 38%).