

SNOHOMISH COUNTY SURFACE WATER MANAGEMENT

# Business Plan Ratepayer Survey Summary

May 3, 2018

## OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Snohomish County Surface Water Management (SWM) is a public utility that provides a variety of services to ratepayers to improve drainage, water quality, aquatic habitat, and floodplain management. SWM is 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, SWM mailed an invitation letter with a weblink to an online version of the survey to 94,736 ratepayers. A total of 5,174 responses representing 5.5% of the ratepayers were received by the survey closure time of 11:59 pm on February 21<sup>st</sup>.

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. 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 SWM Utility

- Approximately 60% 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...?**

<b>SWM service</b>	<b>Very or extremely important</b>	<b>Moderately important</b>	<b>Slightly or not at all important</b>
Maintain stormwater drainage systems	84%	11%	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%	13%	7%
Build projects that reduce local flooding	77%	16%	6%
Build projects to restore rivers, lakes, and streams for fish and wildlife	72%	17%	10%
Maintain a flood warning system	63%	22%	14%
Help residents solve drainage problems on their property	61%	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...?**

<b>SWM service area</b>	<b>A lot or a little more</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>A lot or a little less</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Repair and replace aging stormwater drainage infrastructure	64%	24%	3%	9%
Keep water healthy for swimming and fishing	54%	33%	5%	8%
Protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat	54%	28%	9%	8%
Reduce local flooding	50%	36%	5%	8%
Reduce impacts of river flooding	45%	38%	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%	24%	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. Respondents could select from a list of eight enhancements that were being considered by an independent advisory panel. Respondents could also write in their own enhancement or choose no additional investment (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, only 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	63%
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	27%
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	12%
Expand the flood warning system to additional areas	7%
Other	10%
No additional investment	11%

In total 549 individuals or 10% of respondent selected “Other” and wrote in a priority for additional investments. The responses are summarized as follows:

- 119 wanted changes to regulations & enforcement including:
  - Ensure new developments don’t cause flooding & charge developers fees (51)
  - Increase protective regulations of floodplains, slopes, and wetlands (42)
  - Increase enforcement (14)
  - Make permitting easier (12)
- 78 wanted improved infrastructure & maintenance
  - Culvert/ditch maintenance (41)
  - Storm drain maintenance (14)
  - General infrastructure improvements (23)
- 78 wanted no new taxes and/or improved efficiencies\*
- 59 want increased assistance
  - Drainage assistance (34)
  - Landowner education (25)
- 35 did not feel they had sufficient information to answer appropriately
- 44 wanted reduced street flooding
- 30 wanted river flooding relief (assisting, dredging, or allowing private control)
- 21 wanted actions to improve water quality & health of environment
- 85 provided other responses including septic systems, beaver management, lake levels, water rights, etc.

*\*These individuals may also have selected “No additional investment” as individuals who wrote in a response could also choose up to two additional options.*

## Residential Incentive Program

Survey respondents were asked what types of projects that they or their neighbors would want to receive financial incentives to implement on their property. Respondents could select from 4 projects that either address drainage problems or prevent water pollution. They could also select “other” and write-in an option or select that they are not interested in any projects (see Table 5).

**Table 5. For what types of projects might you or your neighbors be interested in receiving financial incentives? (select all that apply)**

Project Type	Percentage
Install rain barrels, rain gardens, pervious pavement, and other ways to reduce and clean stormwater runoff	51%
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	18%

In total, 682 or 14% of respondents provided a response of “Other projects that address drainage problems or prevent water pollution” and are summarized as follows:

- 385 landowner provided other project ideas for incentives including:
  - 97 for assistance managing runoff on their property including runoff from streets
  - 38 for assistance with private drainage facilities or roads
  - 37 for increased education to residents
  - 34 for projects that improve aquatic habitat or wetlands
  - 31 for assistance managing river and stream flooding and erosion
  - 30 for projects to reduce pollution such as green infrastructure
  - 28 for assistance with septic systems/connecting to sewers
  - 19 for assistance with beaver management
  - 64 provided a large variety of other project ideas
- 42 Landowners indicated that public funds should not be used for incentives
- 262 respondents provided comments that were not an idea for a project incentive. Instead they used the opportunity to write in suggestions for other SWM or Snohomish County services including:
  - 87 requests for improved maintenance or replacement of existing ditches/culverts/storm drains
  - 79 requests for improved development regulations to prevent flooding, relief from flooding caused by development or increased enforcement of development regulations.
  - 40 requests to respond to a specific drainage or flooding issue
  - 26 requests to focus on infrastructure
  - 13 requests to manage garbage in public areas
  - 10 requests for lake management assistance
  - 7 requests to reduce development regulations

## Other comments regarding Surface Water Management

Survey respondents were asked what other comments or suggestions they had regarding Surface Water Management. In total 1,138 respondents provided comments which were categorized into general topics (see Table 6). Several of the suggested topics fall outside of SWM’s responsibility but are presented below to provide the full scope of suggestions.

- County development regulation (161):
  - Concerns that new developments have already or will cause flooding (73)
  - The need for more protective regulations for flooding, wetlands, and steep slopes (58)
  - Call for increased enforcement (30)
  - Easier permitting/fewer regulations or concerns for private property rights (39)

- Budget/funding concerns (156):
  - Requests to SWM keep fees the same or lower (73) with a few requesting an increase (6)
  - Increased efficiency to maximize fees (50)
  - Concerns about the rate structure and other comments (27)
- Compliments on SWM’s past good work (148)
- Additional outreach and education on actions to protect water or on SWM services (107):
- The remaining topics were focused on specific SWM services with ditch, culvert, and detention pond maintenance having the highest number of comments.

**Table 6. What other suggestions or comments do you have regarding Surface Water Management?**

Comment Topic	Number
Development regulations and enforcement	200
Budget & fees	165
Keep up good work	148
Education and outreach	107
Ditch, culvert & detention pond maintenance	112
Flooding on roads	66
Reducing pollution	45
Protection for fish, wildlife, or natural areas	40
Infrastructure as main work focus	31
Request for home drainage assistance	28
Assistance with river/stream flooding	26
All other responses	168
<b>Total</b>	<b>1136</b>

## Request for follow-up information

Survey respondents were asked if they would like SWM to contact them. Of the survey respondents:

- 763 responded they would like SWM to follow-up on a drainage, flooding, water quality, or other concern
- 2871 responded that they would like to receive survey results and updates regarding the work priorities of Surface Water Management

## ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

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

- Overall 97% of respondents reported owning only residential property in Snohomish County, 2.4% reported owning both residential and commercial property, and 0.4% reported only owning commercial property.
- Respondents most commonly reported that the area around their property is suburban (41%), rural (29%), or rural transitioning to suburban (23%). Approximately 7% of respondents reported owning property in an urban area.
- Half (50%) of respondents reported that their property is not within 200 feet of a natural waterbody. Another 40% 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 (8%)
  - 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 (47% 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 22%).
- When asked about their priorities for program enhancements, shoreline property owners were:
  - Less likely to prioritize “replace aging drainage pipes before they fail” (56% 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” (31% versus 23%).
  - Somewhat more likely to prioritize “speed up replacement of culverts that block fish migration” (29% versus 26%).
  - Somewhat less likely to say no additional investment is needed to enhance SWM services (9% versus 12%).

- Shoreline property owners were somewhat more likely to be interested in financial incentives for projects to plant trees along shorelines (52% versus 44%) and somewhat less likely to say they and their neighbors were not interested in any projects (14% versus 21%).
- Shoreline property owners were more likely to own property in a rural area (38% versus 23%) or a rural area that is transitioning to suburban (26% versus 22%).

### 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 (61%) and transitioning (64%) property owners were somewhat more likely to know that Snohomish County has a stormwater utility than were urban (59%) and suburban (57%) property owners.
- 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 (55% rural and 61% transitioning, versus 70% suburban and 68% urban).
  - Somewhat less likely to prioritize increasing maintenance of drainage systems to reduce pollution (45% rural and 51% transitioning versus 59% 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 (30% rural versus 30% transitioning and 22% suburban).
- Property owners in both urban (25%) and rural areas (20%) were somewhat more likely to report no interest in financial incentives for any projects than property owners in suburban (18%) 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 (28% versus 30%).
  - Identify and fix water pollution problems (46% versus 51%).
  - Help residents and businesses prevent water pollution (40% versus 46%).
  - Build projects that restore rivers, lakes, and streams for fish and wildlife (38% versus 44%).
- 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 25%).
  - 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 (39% versus 44%) and somewhat more likely to describe the surrounding area as rural (30% versus 28%).
  - Somewhat more likely to own property within 200 feet of a waterbody (42% versus 36%) 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 (58% of commercial respondents versus 81% of residential respondents).
  - Identify and fix water pollution problems (62% versus 84%).
  - Help residents and businesses prevent water pollution (56% versus 79%).
  - Build projects to restore rivers, lakes, and streams for fish and wildlife (51% 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 (29% of commercial respondents versus 9% of residential respondents).
  - Keep water healthy for swimming and fishing (15% versus 4%)
- When asked about their priorities for program enhancements, commercial property owners were:
  - More likely to say no additional investment is needed (27% of commercial respondents versus 10% of residential respondents).
  - Less likely to prioritize “speed up work to restore rivers, lakes, and streams for fish and wildlife” (21% versus 38%).
  - Less likely to prioritize “increase maintenance of drainage systems to reduce pollution (44% versus 53%).
  - Somewhat more likely to prioritize “expand the flood warning system to additional areas” (12% versus 7%).
- Residential property owners are 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 26% of commercial respondents).
- Commercial property owners were:
  - Somewhat more likely to own property in an urban area (13% of commercial respondents versus 7% of residential respondents).
  - Less likely to own property in a suburban area (27% versus 41%).
  - More likely to own property within 200 feet of a waterbody (59% versus 40%).

## TABLE OF APPENDICES

**Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire**

**Appendix B: Response Summary by Question**

**Appendix C: Response Summary Categorized by Shoreline Ownership**

**Appendix D: Response Summary Categorized by Urban/Rural Ownership**

**Appendix E: Response Summary Categorized by Knowledge of Stormwater Utility**

**Appendix F: Response Summary Categorized by Commercial/Residential Ownership**