

For Release: April 12, 2021

Contact: Andrea Hood (360-306-7379) andrea.hood@doh.wa.gov
Bellingham WA



Whatcom Clean Water Program asks for help to prevent pollution

This spring, [Whatcom Clean Water Program](#) partners are asking local residents to re-engage in helping to keep our waterways clean and community healthy. During late 2020 and early 2021, local clean water partners measured high fecal bacteria levels in portions of Drayton Harbor and Portage Bay shellfish growing areas. Drayton Harbor supports commercial, recreational, and tribal harvesting opportunities. Portage Bay is home to one of the Lummi Nation's important commercial, ceremonial, and subsistence shellfish growing areas located on the Lummi Indian Reservation.

The recent increases in bacteria levels may have set-back hard-won efforts over the past several years to improve water quality in the areas and recover year-round shellfish harvest. Community-wide action is needed now to reverse these trends.

Fecal bacteria are present in the feces (poop) of warm-blooded animals including humans. Potential sources include livestock and other farm animals, dogs, wildlife, and septic systems. When high bacteria levels get in our waterways it increases the risk of people getting sick from contacting contaminated water. When too much bacteria are measured in the water, beaches and shellfish beds can be closed.

The good news is that community efforts in the past have succeeded in improving water quality. We know small steps by everyone can make a big positive difference. Picking up pet poop (every time), inspecting your septic systems to prevent costly and messy failures, using marina pump out stations, keeping farm animals off wet pastures, and managing manure responsibly are just some of the actions that help. There are ways for everyone to be a part of the solution. For more complete resource information, visit [spring 2021 tips](#).

Whatcom Clean Water Program agencies coordinate with citizen groups, agriculture and shellfish advisory boards, watershed improvement districts, local jurisdictions, and Canada partners to offer residents technical and financial help to fix potential pollution sources. Grants through the Environmental Protection Agency National Estuary Program have supplemented local and state support for Whatcom's pollution identification and correction program.

Everyone should be able to safely enjoy swimming, fishing, boating, crabbing, and shellfish harvesting in Whatcom County. The community has met this challenge before, and we can do it again. Working together, we can protect the health of our families and allow our community to thrive.

On behalf of the following [Whatcom Clean Water Program](#) partners:

Whatcom Conservation District	Washington Department of Agriculture
Whatcom County Health Department	Washington Department of Ecology
Whatcom County Planning & Development Services	Washington Department of Health
Whatcom County Public Works	

- Spring 2021 tips: https://whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/47020/2021-Spring-Tips_final?bidId
- Whatcom Clean Water Program: <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/41596/WhatcomCleanWaterProgram>