



Clean Water, Healthy Habitat

King County has a long history of protecting and restoring clean water and healthy habitat, through land conservation, habitat restoration, wastewater treatment, stormwater management, and clean-up of historic pollution. Even with these efforts, orca remain critically endangered and Puget Sound salmon runs continue to decline. As this region experiences rapid growth and a changing climate, we must focus our future investments on actions that will bring the greatest gains for orca, salmon, and our quality of life before it's too late.

BACKGROUND

Our waters are impacted every day by pollution and toxics from our cars and homes, wastewater treatment, and new land clearing and development for homes and infrastructure. Past development has significantly altered our landscape and historic industrial pollution continues to impact water quality.

Rapid population growth in Central Puget Sound brings new pressures to the Salish Sea. Aging and outdated infrastructure, including culverts that block fish passage, put both habitat and property at risk. As fish runs decline, Tribal treaty rights to harvest salmon and shellfish are under greater threat.

All parts of our watersheds, from the Cascade Crest to the waters of Puget Sound, are important to ecosystem health. Forested headwaters slowly release and filter water, streams and rivers provide shade and habitat for a multitude of species, and estuaries and saltwater shoreline areas are essential to the survival of Puget Sound salmon.

King County has important roles and responsibilities in the protection and restoration of healthy watersheds and the salmon that depend on them. The County provides regional wastewater treatment for 1.7 million residents and local stormwater services in unincorporated King County. King County protects forested headwaters, critical habitat, and river corridors that are essential to salmon conservation and recovery and works with partners to restore watershed functions. We also have a key role to play in cleaning up historic pollution and keeping toxics out of waterways. Through growth management and development regulations, we shape our natural and built environment for generations to come.

Our investments in clean water and healthy habitat need to be made in the context of our ecosystem, addressing the greatest threats first and integrating actions throughout watersheds. Recent research has shown that Southern Resident orca rely heavily on Chinook salmon, including salmon from urban rivers in King County, for their survival. Habitat loss, stormwater pollution, and toxics are top threats to orca, salmon, and the health of Salish Sea. Climate change—with rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and ocean acidification—accentuates these threats.

Current water quality standards for wastewater treatment drive a focus of investments on reducing overflows of untreated wastewater and stormwater during winter storms (known as Combined Sewer Overflows or CSOs). King County has made significant investments and progress in controlling CSOs, including completion of the \$35 million Rainier Valley Wet Weather Storage Facility that will reduce



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overflows to the Duwamish River. However, we know that CSOs make up a small portion of the overall pollutant loading entering waterways and only occur for a short period of time during the year; stormwater runoff will continue to be an even larger pathway for pollution to enter our waterways.

Our future investments in water quality and habitat – projected at \$6.3 billion over 10 years – must be integrated across County programs and focused on those actions that will bring the best outcomes for water quality, habitat, and health.

PROPOSED INVESTMENT & ANTICIPATED IMPACT

The perilously low numbers of Southern Resident orcas and continued declines of Puget Sound salmon runs is a call to action. ***The 2019 -2020 budget proposal aligns water quality and habitat investments to address the greatest threats to clean water and healthy habitat: stormwater pollution, habitat loss, and toxics.***

Stormwater Management and Culverts

- **Invest \$12.5 million to fix culverts** as a down payment to open 150 miles of historic salmon habitat. This investment includes development of a comprehensive culvert strategy that prioritizes retrofits where they will have the greatest habitat benefits. The Executive is proposing a 20 percent increase in King County's Stormwater Management Fee to support this and additional water quality and habitat investments.
- **Invest nearly \$700,000 to initiate implementation of the [Bear Creek Watershed Management Plan](#)** to better control flooding and improve water quality and habitat. Bear Creek, a pilot basin for basin planning, could become a model for retrofitting stormwater facilities.
- **Research climate impacts** on changing rainfall patterns and sea level rise so we can strengthen resiliency of our built and natural environment, and better design wastewater treatment and stormwater facilities.
- **Invest \$500,000 to improve stormwater management in the Green/Duwamish Basin** using a collaborative watershed-based approach.

Habitat Conservation and Restoration

- **Accelerate conservation of habitat, urban open space, and working farms and forest land**, using debt financing to support up to \$148 million in new investment in four years. This is a significant "down payment" on the County's [Land Conservation Initiative](#) to protect key habitat, urban open space, and working forests and farms in 30 years.
- **Invest \$45 million in county funding and grants to restore shoreline habitat**, focusing on priorities developed through watershed-based salmon recovery forums.
- **Invest \$3.7 million to restore forest health, capture carbon pollution, and reach our goal of** planting a million trees with regional partners by 2020. Between 2018 and 2020, King County Parks will plant 130,000 conifers on 700 acres of county parks and natural lands.
- **Update county shoreline protections in 2019** to streamline permitting for restoration projects, prohibit commercial net pens for Atlantic salmon, and factor in sea level rise projections.
- **Assess opportunities to restore stream flows** in basins impacted by development and withdrawals from wells. King County will complete an assessment of potential water withdrawals under current zoning for unincorporated King County and participate in new Ecology-led watershed planning efforts to improve stream flows for fish.



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Wastewater Treatment and Water Quality

- **Invest an additional \$170 million in 2019-2020 to control CSOs** and update the CSO Long-term Control Plan.
- **Undertake a Systemwide Comprehensive Planning effort** to address aging wastewater treatment and conveyance infrastructure, stormwater inflows, climate impacts, and changing regulations. This planning effort will help the County create a long-term blueprint for wastewater treatment that brings the best outcomes for water quality and health, while meeting the needs of our customers and ratepayers.
- **Allocate \$3 million to assess and implement new, alternative water quality investments** (e.g., removal of creosote pilings and green stormwater infrastructure) resulting in greater water quality and health benefits. The County will collaborate with federal and state regulators, tribes, and stakeholders to use the best available science to inform data-driven decisions and assess combinations of actions that will bring equal or greater benefit than CSO control alone.

We are at a crossroads: Chinook salmon and orca are in crisis, despite significant public investment in salmon recovery and wastewater treatment. As the County ramps up investment in habitat, stormwater, and wastewater, it is imperative that our priorities are aligned to address the greatest threats, and accomplish the best outcomes before it is too late. The County will work with Tribes, federal and state regulators, cities, residents and ratepayers to ensure that investments in water quality and habitat—projected at \$6.3 billion over 10 years—bring the best outcomes for water quality, habitat, and health.