



Watershed Planning

Growth Management Services
The link between growth management, and watershed planning



Description

Population growth, economic expansion, hydropower generation, agriculture, transportation, and the survival of fish all depend on plenty of clean water. Planning for the management of water resources under the Watershed Planning Act is taking place in 37 planning units representing 45 of the state's 62 water resource inventory areas (WRIA). WRIsAs that choose to form are assessing water quantity, and they have the option to address water quality, instream flows, and habitat. Thirty WRIsAs have chosen to examine instream flows and water quality and habitat are being addressed in most of the planning groups to some degree. Cities and counties will play a large part in carrying out watershed plans. The Growth Management Act (GMA) provides authority and land use tools to do so.

Background

Because so many competing interests are involved and because the dynamics of water needs to be understood in the context of an entire watershed, the 1998 Legislature passed the Watershed Planning Act. It encourages the creation of voluntary, locally driven, collaborative planning units, WRIsAs, to conduct assessments of water resources and determine how to balance the competing demands for water within a WRIA.

As assessments are completed, choices are being made about priorities, allocations, projects, and land uses. Cities and counties will be called upon to carry out many of these because they administer land use in about 65 percent of the state. In addition, they are responsible for providing much of the infrastructure that supports development and the mitigation required to minimize the impacts of development. The success of the watershed planning efforts depend largely on local land use decisions, development regulations, and capital facilities investments, consistent with the GMA.



What's Being Done

Water travels beyond jurisdictional boundaries. The Watershed Planning Act provides a structure for resolving conflicts about water that involves the interest groups in the watershed. The structure includes watershed planning groups and assistance from the Washington State Department of Ecology and other agencies.

Each watershed-planning group may have participation from more than one county, numerous cities and towns, tribal governments, a host of special purpose districts, such as water and sewer districts, environmentalists, and other interested parties.

Planning units have been organized and grant money distributed through the state Department of Ecology. Watershed groups are debating water issues, including priorities, allocations, projects, and land uses. Data is being generated to help each unit develop its strategy. About half of the WRIAs have adopted their plans. In five watersheds, the planning process was terminated by the planning unit before the plan was approved.



GMA/Watershed Planning Link

The GMA, established in 1990, requires cities and counties to address water resources in a variety of ways. It also gives them the responsibility and authority to plan for water quality and water systems through comprehensive plans and development regulations.

The GMA requires all cities and counties in the state to ensure that:

- Their development regulations, including shoreline master programs, are consistent with and carry out their comprehensive plan.
- Building permits are conditioned on evidence of an adequate quantity and quality of water.
- Subdivisions are approved only after findings of an adequate quantity and quality of water.
- Critical areas – including wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, frequently flooded areas, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas – are designated and protected using the

best available science. Special consideration needs to be given to conserve and protect anadromous fisheries.

Twenty-nine of 39 counties that are required to fully plan under the GMA, and the cities in them, need to also:



- Adopt comprehensive plans guided by 14 goals, including containing sprawl, retaining open space, encouraging economic development within the capacities of the state's resources, and enhancing water quality and water availability. The goals of the Shoreline Management Act (SMA) are also goals of the GMA.
- Ensure that the comprehensive plan's land use chapter reviews drainage, flooding, and stormwater run-off in the area and nearby jurisdictions. Cities and counties need to also provide corrective actions to mitigate or cleanse discharges that pollute the water.
- Provide public facilities and services, many of which affect and/or mitigate impacts to water resources, at the time development occurs. Local governments need to also show how to pay for capital facilities or reassess their land use decisions, if funding is not available.
- Ensure that their activities are consistent with their comprehensive plans, policies, and zoning. This means their water and sewer plans need to match-up with the comprehensive plan. GMA plans should not conflict with jurisdictions having common borders or related regional issues (e.g., water resources in a watershed).



For More Information

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What's Next

Cities and counties will be expected to carry out many of the decisions that come out of the watershed planning efforts. Whether or not they are fully planning under the GMA, their comprehensive plans, capital facilities plans, and development regulations will be keys to carrying out the decisions. For the majority of the state, the GMA provides the framework for these plans. The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and the SMA provide goals, procedures, and regulatory authority to inform and carry out the plans of all communities.

The Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development offers financial and technical assistance resources to help with these efforts. Examples include planning and financial assistance for public facilities and technical assistance on planning for land use and capital facilities and combining the goals and requirements of GMA, SEPA, and SMA.

Photos: Washington Apple Commission; CTED/Rita R. Robison