

# Aligning Across Watersheds: Summary of 2022 Regional Stormwater Technical Workshops

## Introduction

The original [Stormwater Summit: Aligning Across Watersheds](#), convened by King County in May 2021, engaged a group of 360 stormwater practitioners from across Washington State. At that event, King County Executive Dow Constantine issued a challenge to the region: In order to move the needle on treating stormwater pollution in the Salish Sea, we will need to incentivize regional, multi-party stormwater management cooperation and shared priority setting at a watershed level.

Since the first Stormwater Summit, King County and a number of municipal and organizational partners have continued to build progress toward that goal of regional collective impact, implementing iterative strategies designed to provide a foundation for that future. To help further develop those strategies, King County staff hosted three [regional stormwater technical workshops](#) in November and December 2022 to co-design a series of informed implementation targets for regional collaboration and implementation. What follows is the approach and summary of those discussions.

## Background

- Stormwater permits – National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permits – are applied to individual dischargers and drive investments in stormwater management.
- While these permits hold jurisdictions accountable for maintaining stormwater facilities and addressing runoff, untreated stormwater runoff remains the largest source of untreated pollution to the Salish Sea.
- The current regulatory structure focused on individual jurisdictions has limited incentives and support for prioritizing regional investments where they will have the most impact within watersheds.
- Expanding the number of stormwater retrofit projects across the region presents a significant opportunity to improve stormwater treatment and provide flow control. We also recognize that achieving these retrofits at scale remains a very expensive undertaking.
- We've seen the value of ambitious, science-based, regional goals for focusing action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, accelerating salmon recovery, and conserving open space – and we believe we can replicate those successes in regional stormwater management.

## Overview of the Regional Stormwater Technical Workshops

Over 140 stormwater practitioners – representing 50 cities, counties, and institutional partners across the Puget Sound region – came together for three technical workshops in November and December 2022 to develop provisional regional stormwater implementation targets and goals. The workshops focused on:

- Co-designing aspirational, regional stormwater management goals;
- Identifying barriers to achieving those goals;
- Highlighting new planning tools that will help inform more strategic stormwater investments and define regional implementation targets, and;
- Identifying the roles each of our organizations and jurisdictions could play in achieving these goals.

## Draft provisional regional stormwater goals

- Provisional Goal #1: **Build 30 strategically sited regional stormwater parks.**
- Provisional Goal #2: **Treat 100 miles of roadway runoff through BMPs that remove 6PPD-Q and more.**
- Provisional Goal #3: **Provide flow control to 1,000 acres through a mix of GSI and new or retrofitted detention ponds.**
- *Provisional Goal #4: There is interest from partners in creating a goal around pollution prevention, but this one will look different from the others and needs additional input from partners before finalizing.*

## Key takeaways from the workshops

- The region's political leaders need tangible, measurable goals to rally around.
- King County is committed to co-creating regional implementation targets with our partners to ensure broad buy-in – these statements present a starting point for the engagement.
- We heard a lot of excitement about stormwater parks. There are several existing stormwater parks that we look forward to learning from as we implement this goal.
- We also recognize that involving the public early in proactive community engagement related to planning and design of stormwater parks will be important to each project's success.
- Now that we know the chemical that causes pre-spawn mortality in coho salmon (6PPD-Q), we need to make meaningful strides in reducing this chemical in surface waters. We also must center our efforts on treaty rights when considering where to install roadway treatment.
- There is a lot of energy and excitement around treating roadway runoff for 6PPD-Q as well as other pollutants found in roadway runoff. Work on this goal will be coordinated with our partners at WSDOT, the Department of Ecology, and other agencies and jurisdictions.
- There was excitement around education and outreach, engagement, and partnership opportunities with a flow control goal, while partners also voiced caution about long-term maintenance funding needs.
- More work is needed around a regional pollution prevention goal.

## Next Steps

- In response to requests for more information about how the [Water Quality Benefits Evaluation \(WQBE\) toolkit](#) and the [SUSTAIN](#) modeling that informed these preliminary goals, King County will develop draft "fact sheets" for each of the goals in the next couple of months. We will share these fact sheets with the audiences of the May 2021 Stormwater Summit and all three 2022 technical workshops.
- We will continue to inventory and analyze barriers to and opportunities for collaborative investment to achieve these goals, and we will do so in consultation with local governments, Tribes, federal and state regulators, the NGO community, and community partners.
- Building on regional collaboration models like the [King County-Cities Climate Collaboration](#) and watershed-based salmon recovery forums that use shared watershed goals to drive action, we will:
  - Further refine these goals based on your input.
  - Map potential barriers and opportunities for collaborative projects, joint technical work, policy advocacy, and investments where they will have the most benefit to reducing stormwater pollution.
  - Brief city and county elected officials on preliminary shared goals to support decision-making.
  - Convene for a second regional Stormwater Summit in 2023 to review and jointly establish regional goals and action priorities. This event will also highlight collaborative governance models and evaluate frameworks that outline how we can work together as a region to achieve these goals.