

FACT SHEET

Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility

July 2019

What is the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility?

This stormwater utility is a way for Whatcom County to collect fees for the control and treatment of stormwater in the Lake Whatcom watershed. Washington State law (RCW 36.89) allows counties to create stormwater utilities to fund stormwater management services. Most cities and counties pay for stormwater management costs with a stormwater utility.

Why is the new stormwater utility needed?

Whatcom County is required to manage stormwater in the Lake Whatcom watershed and reduce pollution entering the lake. Current funding is not enough for the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Program to meet water quality improvements required by the Washington State Department of Ecology.

Why does the new fee only apply to watershed properties outside city limits?

Whatcom County pays for its portion of costs related to protecting Lake Whatcom water quality from the Flood Tax paid by all Whatcom County property owners. Since properties within the watershed have a greater impact on lake water quality than those in other parts of the county, it was determined that those property owners should pay for this additional funding need. Property owners within the City of Bellingham already pay a stormwater utility fee and a Lake Whatcom watershed protection fee to pay for their portion of Lake Whatcom Stormwater Program expenses, in addition to paying the Flood Tax.

What is the process to establish the stormwater utility and charge fees?

Step 1 (complete): Establish the stormwater utility service area. Whatcom County Council established the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility Service Area in December 2017 (Ordinance 2017-076). The service area is the portion of the Lake Whatcom watershed outside of the Bellingham city limits.

Step 2 (in process): Establish utility rates. Whatcom County Council appointed a citizen advisory committee to represent rate payers in the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility Service Area and participate in a funding study. During the funding study, from June 2018 to March 2019, Whatcom County staff and its consultants presented the committee with a range of rate structure options to evaluate. The citizen advisory committee recommended the proposed rate structure. Whatcom County Council will consider the recommended rate structure and make the final decision on utility rates.

What will the money be used for?

Money collected will go into a dedicated fund within Whatcom County government. This fund may only be used for Lake Whatcom Stormwater Program expenses. The amount of money collected will be approximately \$820,000 per year. This is the amount of additional funds currently needed for Whatcom County to meet water quality improvement objectives required by the Washington State Department of Ecology. The money will be spent on: capital project construction (stormwater treatment), capital project maintenance, outreach and education, homeowner incentives/residential retrofits, water quality monitoring, and administrative costs associated with managing the stormwater utility.

What are the proposed rates?

The proposed rates are based on the amount of impervious surface on a parcel. Impervious surfaces are hard surfaces where rainwater runs off instead of soaking into the ground. Runoff from hard surfaces like buildings, driveways, and parking areas has a greater impact on water quality than runoff from surfaces like landscaping and forest. Due to the higher impact, parcels with more hard surfaces will pay a higher fee.

Single-Family Residences – Fees for single-family residential properties will be based on an average impervious area footprint calculated from a sample of residential properties in the service area. Property owners may apply for a lower rate with documentation of actual impervious area less than the average impervious area assigned to their parcel.

Impervious Footprint Tier	Proposed Annual Charge
Small Footprint less than or equal to 2,500 square feet	\$110.64
Medium Footprint > 2,500 – 8,400 square feet	\$147.52
Large Footprint >8,400 square feet	\$295.04

Single-family residential parcels will be initially assigned a medium or large impervious footprint based on sampling data indicating a correlation between total impervious area and parcel size. Parcels less than or equal to two acres will be assigned a medium footprint. Parcels greater than two acres will be assigned a large footprint. Parcels will be assigned the small footprint in instances where the total lot size is less than or equal to 2,500 square feet.

Non Single-Family Residences (all other parcels) – Fees for all other types of properties in the service area will be based on the measured amount of impervious area on the parcel divided by 4,200 square feet, the average amount of impervious area on a typical residential lot or equivalent service unit (ESU). Rates charged will be equal to the single-family residential medium impervious footprint at \$147.52/ESU.

How will I receive a bill?

The Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility annual charge will be included as a line item on your property tax statement and collected by the Whatcom County Treasurer's Office. Tax-exempt properties will receive a statement with this and any other applicable fees.

For more information

Visit www.whatcomcounty.us/2830 to read answers to frequently asked questions, download a copy of the draft rate ordinance, access links to more detailed background information, and download funding study issue papers and meeting documents. **This page is also kept up to date with the current Whatcom County Council meeting schedule.**

Questions

Direct questions to Whatcom County Public Works staff at LWStormwaterUtility@co.whatcom.wa.us or (360) 778-6230.

Provide your feedback

Whatcom County Council will establish the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility rates through the legislative process. You can submit written comments to County Council at council@co.whatcom.wa.us or 311 Grand Avenue, Suite 105, Bellingham, WA 98225. You may provide verbal testimony at the public hearing before County Council on July 23, 2019. Visit the Whatcom County Council website to confirm council meeting schedule and download meeting agendas <http://whatcomcounty.us/268/County-Council> or call (360) 778-5010.