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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FALL RAINS LEAD TO HIGH BACTERIA POLLUTION LEVELS IN PORTAGE BAY

BELLINGHAM—In April, our community celebrated the reopening of spring shellfish harvest in Portage Bay. The Washington State Department of Health announced the spring reopening, recognizing community actions to reduce fecal bacteria pollution in the Nooksack River watershed that flows to Portage Bay. With recovery of spring harvest achieved, Portage Bay remains closed to harvest only three months a year during the fall.

We were hopeful that we could continue to track improving water quality this fall season. However, September water testing for fecal bacteria told a different story. Fecal bacteria measurements in Portage Bay failed to meet criteria set to protect the health of people eating shellfish. Residents, agencies, and local organizations work together to protect water quality throughout the year and particularly in preparation for the fall season, so news of the high bacteria counts is disappointing. While many community members are taking proactive measures to prepare for fall rains, there is still room for improvement. Each of us may contribute pollution and every step toward prevention makes a difference.

Fall is a challenging time for improving water quality and requires consistent efforts to address preventable sources of fecal bacteria pollution. After months of dry summer weather, fecal bacteria from sources such as farm animals and pets build up on the land. Fall rains pick up pollutants and carry them into our ditches and creeks and downstream to our bays and harbors. Fecal bacteria pollution limits people's ability to safely work in, play in, and harvest food from local waters.

We all need clean water - let's work together to prevent water pollution. There are many resources available to help. We have tips for farms, septic systems, pet waste, boats and RVs, and urban wildlife to help you find a way to contribute to the solution. For more information about water quality in the Nooksack River watershed and resources for addressing pollution sources visit the Whatcom County Public Works – Natural Resources website at <http://www.whatcomcounty.us/1072/Water-Quality>

The Whatcom Clean Water Program is a partnership of local, state, tribal and federal organizations working to reduce fecal bacteria in Whatcom County surface waters and restore shellfish growing areas. [Learn more about the partnership and actions you can take to make a difference.](#)



* Note: Poop may also enter the water from direct discharging or dumping.