

King County Surface Water Management (SWM) Fee Facts

Prepared by the Department of Natural Resources and Parks

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Background

- King County is committed to protecting water quality and the health of the Puget Sound. We do this for environmental as well as public health and safety reasons.
- King County's SWM fee pays for:
 - Capital projects to improve drainage and water quality, stabilize ravines, and restore fish and wildlife habitat damaged by runoff;
 - Assistance to farmers, livestock owners, rural and forest landowners on best practices and land stewardship;
 - Agricultural drainage assistance;
 - Customer service calls and assistance to respond to drainage and water quality problems, erosion, sedimentation, and stormwater facility concerns;
 - Inspecting and maintaining more than 2,000 retention and detention ponds for controlling runoff, bio-swales for removing pollutants from runoff, and pipes and ditches for conveying runoff;
 - Monitoring county waters to ensure water quality is protected; and
 - Developing and implementing stormwater regulations for new construction to protect water quality.
- As part of the 2013 Budget Proposal, the County Executive proposed an increase in the SWM fee to:
 1. Comply with more rigorous state stormwater regulations,
 2. Repair aging facilities,
 3. Accelerate projects to reduce polluted runoff from roads and restore habitat,
 4. Maintain direct assistance to farmers and residential landowners, and
 5. Proactively manage infrastructure to reduce emergency maintenance.
- The County Council adopted a SWM fee increase in November 2012 that will be phased in over two years. Residential landowners will see a SWM fee increase of \$18 in 2013 (from a current annual rate of \$133), and \$20.50 in 2014.

What Are the Benefits of the Fee Increase?

- **Improved water quality** – protection of water resources required by the state and an expansion in stormwater facilities to address critical problems.
- **Strong SWM facility program** – facility maintenance to avoid high-cost emergency repairs, asset management to improve safety and efficiency, and a capital program that helps prevent flooding from stormwater.
- **Expanded drainage assistance** to residents and farmers to address neighborhood flooding and maintain agricultural drainage.
- **Accelerated habitat protection**, including investments to address polluted stormwater runoff from roads – one of the largest threats to the water quality of Puget Sound.

Why an Increase?

Drivers for the current increase include new state requirements for preventing stormwater pollution of Puget Sound, reduced revenue for core services like drainage assistance to farmers, and the need for preventive maintenance of our aging stormwater facilities.

- The Washington Department of Ecology has ranked stormwater runoff the number one pollution threat to Puget Sound. The SWM fee funds the facility retrofits, restoration, and education programs that respond to this threat and help protect and improve water quality in our region.
- The Washington Department of Ecology has issued a more stringent and environmentally protective permit for County management of stormwater runoff and water quality in the unincorporated area. It will cost more to comply with this new permit.
- Revenues to provide service area-wide services such as agricultural drainage assistance, assistance for forest health, and salmon recovery programs are declining as cities annex the more densely developed areas of unincorporated King County. The County loses the SWM revenue when areas annex to cities. Although the County's cost of providing site-specific services is eliminated in annexed areas, the basic costs of running the area-wide SWM rural programs do not decrease in corresponding amounts. There are core functions critical to maintaining and protecting water quality, and the cost of those must be borne by fewer remaining parcels in unincorporated King County.
- Our stormwater management infrastructure is aging. We have seen two failures of major conveyance facilities in our system and have had to delay other projects to address emergencies. These failures not only inconvenience residents and cause property damage but may also threaten public safety. Timely maintenance will help reduce the need for costly emergency repairs and associated disruptions.

Capital Investments

- By taking advantage of low interest rates and the County's bond rating, we can moderate SWM rate impacts while significantly advancing and accelerating work to restore water quality and salmon habitat that will help recover Puget Sound.
- The capital program will be expanded and accelerated over the next three years to address:
 - Stormwater water runoff problems,
 - Farm drainage maintenance projects,
 - Small neighborhood drainage projects,
 - Drainage and water quality improvement projects in roadways, and
 - Protection and restoration of salmon habitat.

How Do We Compare to Other Jurisdictions? We are in the middle range.

- Unincorporated area residential property owners currently pay a SWM fee of \$133 a year. They will pay \$151 in 2013 and \$171.50 in 2014. The resultant fee in 2014 will be above the median but still fall in the middle range of what other cities and counties in our region charge landowners.
- Most agricultural properties will continue to be charged per parcel rates equal to single family rates.
- Non-residential/commercial properties would see similar percentage increases by acreage and rate class. Discounts can be applied if property owners currently have or install stormwater control facilities.

Are there discounts available? Yes.

- All eligible parcels may apply for a discount that rewards property owners who manage stormwater quantity and quality on-site with facilities or best management practices. These discounts have been revised to provide greater incentive for commercial/non-residential properties to improve their on-site management of stormwater runoff.
- Low-income seniors and disabled residents remain exempt from SWM fees.

Summary of Proposed Rate Increase for 2013-2014 (increased phased in over two years)

| Description | \$ Increase | % of Rate Increase |
|---|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Maintenance of Current Programs | \$17.50 | 45% |
| NPDES Permit from Washington State | \$15.00 | 39% |
| Capital Asset Management System | \$2.00 | 5% |
| Capital Program Expansion (and Debt Service) | \$1.00 | 3% |
| Roads Water Quality Maintenance Projects (\$1M transfer in 2013 only) | \$3.00 | 8% |
| Totals | \$38.50 | 100% |