



# Whatcom Conservation District

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## **Whatcom Conservation District and partners embark on new research using DNA to identify sources of bacteria in our waterways.**

The Whatcom Conservation District is partnering with Exact Scientific Services and Practical Informatics on new research to improve water quality pollution source characterization in Whatcom County by using DNA molecular source tracking techniques.

Bacteria measured in many of the creeks, rivers, and beaches around Whatcom County are above the levels recommended by Washington State for safe recreation and shellfish harvest. Fecal bacteria pollution comes from many sources including septic systems, livestock, wildlife, pet waste, and marinas. As a member of the Whatcom Clean Water Program, Whatcom Conservation District works with many local partners to reduce pollution in our waterways. By monitoring for fecal bacteria, partners are able to find and fix sources of pollution, making our water safer for everyone.

Thanks to new funding from the Washington State Conservation Commission, the Whatcom Conservation District and project partners are beginning work on a year-long project to test whether the DNA of bacteria in our waterways can be used to accurately identify sources of pollution. Over the next year, project partners will build a fecal reference catalog, containing “fingerprints” of potential water pollution sources in Whatcom County. This reference catalog will be used to evaluate water samples from areas with historically elevated bacteria and a variety of potential pollution sources. The method should be able to identify what fecal sources are contributing bacteria to water. The goal of this research is to improve the future of data-driven water quality sampling and analysis in order to better identify and provide technical assistance to fix sources of fecal pollution in Whatcom County.

Bacteria pollution in our waterways is preventable. For more information on how you can make a difference in keeping our waters clean, visit: <http://www.whatcomcounty.us/1072/Water-Quality>

Interested in how you can get involved? You can track wildlife in your area to help us better understand where wildlife are likely to be seen and how these animals may be impacting water quality in Whatcom County. The next time you see wildlife on your property, or while driving around, please log your sighting into the Whatcom Wildlife Tracker app here: <https://arcgis/14nWlj>.