

# Are You Ready for Spring?

Winter rains are behind us, let's get ready to be outside

Mud, ponded water, and streams flowing through our yards...winter was tough this year. With all that water, soils are soaked. Spring rains flow over wet soils, picking up and carrying pollutants on the land into ditches and creeks. This includes poop and bacteria from livestock, dogs, wildlife, and improperly functioning septic systems.

Water carries fecal bacteria through our ditches and creeks, downstream to rivers and into our bays and harbors. High bacteria levels increase the risk of people getting sick from contacting contaminated water. Our favorite beaches are closed to swimming and harvesting shellfish when there is too much bacteria.

Everyone should be able to enjoy swimming, fishing, boating, crabbing, and harvesting shellfish - safely. Working together we can reduce bacteria, protect the health of our families, and allow our community to thrive.

Many neighbors are helping to protect water quality and our community's health by responsibly managing manure and pet waste, reducing mud and soil compaction, and ensuring properly functioning septic systems. There are ways for everyone to be a part of the solution. The spring season tips below can get you started.

## Tips for Pet Waste

Like human poop, pet poop is raw sewage containing pathogens such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites that can make other animals or people sick. When people leave their pets' waste on the ground, it's not only gross to step in, the rain will wash the pathogens from pet poop into stormdrains, ditches, and creeks.

Scoop, Bag, and Trash it! Take the Scoop the Poop Pledge and make sure to follow through on the last step. Bags of poo forgotten on the ground or flung into bushes or trees, become torn and poo-llution is washed into community waterways. Bag it and throw it in the trash.

Become a Neighborhood Ambassador, receive a sign and Scoop the Poop supplies to share with others.

### Take 2 for Poo - 2 Bags, 2 Minutes, 2 Chances

- 2 Bags - Bring 2 poop bags or take 2 bags from the bag dispenser. This way you have one ready and another on hand for any surprises.
- 2 Minutes - Scooping your pet's poop will take less than 2 minutes to scoop, tie and put in the trash.
- 2 Chances - You have 2 chances to do a good deed. Still have an extra bag near the end of your walk? Use the extra bag to pick up a poo that someone missed, or use it to pick up other trash.

For more information about these pet waste programs, visit [www.whatcomcounty.us/scooppoop](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/scooppoop).



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



## Tips for Septic Systems

Regularly evaluating and maintaining your septic system can help you find and fix small problems early, before a big (costly) problem develops. Too much water and sewage going to your drainfield may cause your septic system to overload. If this occurs you may run the risk of sewage backing up into your home or surfacing in your yard. A septic system's drainfield typically fails because too much water from the house, an outside source, or both, is flushed into the system. Here are some specific tips to help keep excess water out of your septic system and protect your property.



### SEPTIC BASICS

Repair leaking toilet flappers. A worn out toilet flapper can allow water to leak from the toilet tank to the toilet bowl. These leaks often go unnoticed and could send hundreds of gallons of additional water each day through your septic system. Repairing a leaking toilet flapper is quick and cheap, and has the added benefit of reducing your water bill! <https://www.epa.gov/watersense/fix-leak-week>

Spread out the timing of your laundry loads. Try to do laundry throughout the week and avoid 'laundry catch up days'. Modern high-efficiency washing machines can use between 10 and 20 gallons of water per load. Older top loading washing machines can use up to 40 gallons per load. Washing five loads of laundry in one day could send more than 200 gallons of water through your septic system, which may be too much for your system to handle.

Divert runoff/downspouts. Divert excess water away from your septic tank and drainfield. Make sure that roof gutters and downspout extensions are in place to direct water away from your septic system. A drainfield that is constantly wet is unable to treat sewage properly. If you notice problems, call the health department or a licensed septic professional for advice.

High water alarm. If your high water alarm was going off during the wettest and rainiest months this past winter, it's a good sign to call a professional. If components of your septic system are not watertight, raw untreated sewage could be leaking into your yard.



FINANCIAL  
ASSISTANCE

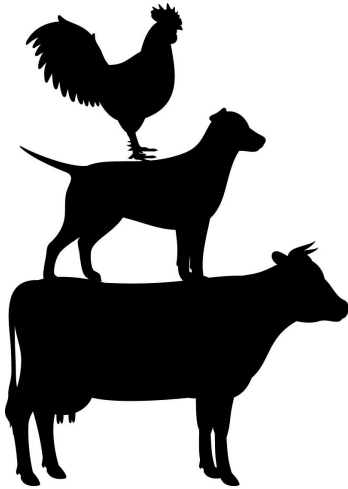
For more information about septic systems, visit [www.whatcomcounty.us/septic](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/septic) or call the Whatcom County Health Department at (360) 778-6000. For rebate information, visit [www.co.whatcom.wa.us/2257/Septic-Maintenance-Rebate-Program](http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/2257/Septic-Maintenance-Rebate-Program).

## Tips for Farms

Spring is a great time to start the projects you have been planning all winter. Whatcom Conservation District (CD) provides free and confidential farm planning advice. They can also loan you a manure spreader or poultry processing equipment and connect you with rebates and grants for your farm improvement dreams. Contacting the CD is the first step towards your \$200 rebate for barn gutters, fencing or heavy use area footing. For CD program information, visit <https://www.whatcomcd.org/landowner-tools> or call (360) 526-2381.

### Pastures

Assess pastures before opening pasture gates. Animals on wet fields can compact the soils and damage newly growing grass. Compaction and early damage limits your field's ability to produce forage throughout the growing season. If the field is too wet for your feet, it's also too wet for your animals.



Install fences or check existing fences to ensure animals are excluded from wet areas, including swales, ditches, streams, ponds, and wetlands. Rebates available for fencing: [www.whatcomcounty.us/2909/Small-Farm-Improvement-Rebates](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/2909/Small-Farm-Improvement-Rebates).

Avoid overgrazing. To get the most from your grass this season, move grazing animals from a pasture when the grass gets below 3 inches tall. Rotate the animals to another field and back to the original pasture when the grass is back to 6 inches or more.

Follow manure application setback guidelines for pasturing animals. Just like manure spreading equipment, animals apply manure to your fields. Check and follow the recommended or required setback distances that apply to you (e.g. [seasonal manure application setbacks](#), Critical Areas Ordinance requirements, or Department of Ecology recommendations). The Whatcom Conservation District can help you determine appropriate setbacks.

### **Manure Nutrient Applications and Storage**

Get manure on to fields at the right time. The right time to apply manure nutrients to your pastures/crops depends on some variables. Consider if your soil is dry enough, when plants need the nutrients, and if the weather is compliant. Check the Whatcom Conservation District's [Manure Spreading Advisory](#) to find the best time to apply nutrients and call to inquire about borrowing their manure spreader to get the job done.

Follow seasonal manure application setback guidelines. From March through May, the setback is **40 feet** from all waterways and swales. The recommended setback from waterways moves to **10 feet** during June through August. The setback distances apply to application of solid and liquid manure as well as to grazing animals.

Apply nutrients at agronomic rates. Match manure nutrient application (amount and timing) to what your pastures and crops need. Split applications throughout the growing season to maximize nutrient availability and uptake by plants. That includes accounting for grazing animals as "applicators."

Sign up to receive manure text alerts from Whatcom Conservation District. Text "EZManure" to 797979 to receive notices of significant weather events and manure application tips.

Cover manure storage or compost system. Cover your manure pile with a tarp or roof structure through the wet spring and into the dry summer. Covering your manure pile preserves nutrients, reduces polluted runoff in the spring, and prevents wind drift from your farm in the summer. Contact the Whatcom Conservation District for a free tarp, or share your manure with others for fertilizer with the manure link program.

<https://www.whatcomcd.org/manure-link>.

### **Cover Crops**

Plan your cover crop or relay crop. Cover and relay crops are a great way to hold soil and nutrients in place during the fall and winter months. Reducing soil and nutrient transport helps protect ground and surface water quality and improves your field's soil fertility.



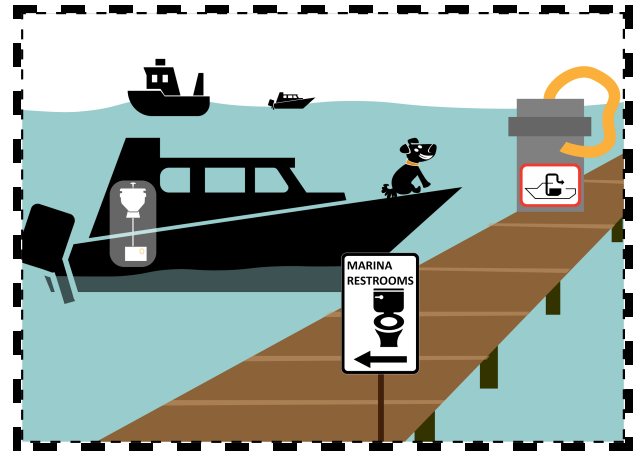
## Tips for Boats and Recreational Vehicles

**Always** use a designated pump out station to dispose of sewage from your boat or RV. Discharging black or gray water anywhere else is illegal and dangerous! Protect your family, neighbors, and waterways by following the sanitary disposal tips below:

Boat Holding Tanks: Puget Sound marine waters are a no-discharge zone (NDZ) for boat sewage. Find pump out stations at <https://pumpoutwashington.org/>.

RV Holding Tanks: RV dump stations are available at various locations across the county and state. Plan your route so you know you don't forget to dispose of your holding tank waste properly. Use this [Sanidumps map](#) or visit [WSDOT](#) for more resources.

**Note:** If you are staying in an RV for an extended amount of time, call the health department, (360)-778-6000, to talk about safe ways to connect to a septic system or other pump out options available to you. Some local septic companies may be able to provide on-site RV tank pumping.



## Tips for Wildlife

Larger than natural populations of wildlife, such as raccoons, can be a source of bacteria in creeks. When people make food and shelter easily accessible to wildlife, animals can increase their populations above natural levels.



Do not feed wildlife. Feeding wildlife, especially 'people food', might cause them serious health problems. Unnatural gathering of animals also makes it easier for diseases to spread among them. Secure pet food, garbage, and compost from wildlife.

Block off crawl spaces and attic vents from wildlife access.

For more information about wildlife, visit [www.whatcomcounty.us/2916/I-See-Urban-Wildlife](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/2916/I-See-Urban-Wildlife).



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 this partnership at [www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/41596/](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/41596/).

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