

# Focus on: Nutrients General Permit Process



## More information

The Puget Sound Nutrients General Permit is a crucial step in reducing human sources of nutrients to protect Puget Sound. [Technologies used to reduce nutrients](#) may also reduce toxics. The general permit approach has multiple benefits for protecting water quality in the Puget Sound.

## Contact information

**Eleanor Ott**

360.407.6433

PSNutrientsGP@ecy.wa.gov

## ADA Accessibility

To request ADA accommodation including materials in a format for the visually impaired, visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>, call Ecology at 360-407-6831, Relay Service 711, or TTY 877-833-6341.

## Nutrients are a problem in Puget Sound

Excess nutrients, particularly nitrogen, from domestic wastewater treatment plants (WWTP) are contributing to low dissolved oxygen in Puget Sound, stressing aquatic life, and threatening to increase algal blooms and intensify fish kills. Studies shows that many parts of Puget Sound have oxygen levels that are below what marine life needs to thrive and do not meet water quality standards. State and federal law requires Ecology and local municipalities to enhance WWTPs to remove excess nutrients.

## A general permit is the best tool for controlling nutrients

Ecology received feedback on whether to use individual permits or a general permit to control nutrients. In January 2020, we decided a Nutrients General Permit is the best tool to implement legal mandates necessary to address nutrients from the approximately 70 domestic WWTPs that discharge to Puget Sound. The general permit:

- Creates a single coordinated public engagement process and allows flexibility for communities to collectively address nutrients including possibly developing a trading program.
- Places WWTPs on a shared schedule, rather than staggered permit reissuance schedules for individual permits.
- Creates an opportunity to develop consistent facility data by aligning monitoring requirements for permittees.

## Controlling nutrients by planning for the future

Our initial priority is preventing the problem from getting worse while we work on long-term solutions. We must control nutrients at current levels while accommodating growth. Several options exist to design the permit in ways that will allow for growth, including optimizing current infrastructure to reduce nutrient discharges as much as possible and considering additional treatment technologies. Also, it will require communities to plan for future growth, and additional modeling to inform protective nutrient limits. The general permit will be updated every five years, and communities will have opportunities to help determine how to reach the nutrient reduction targets.

## Puget Sound Nutrient Source Reduction Project



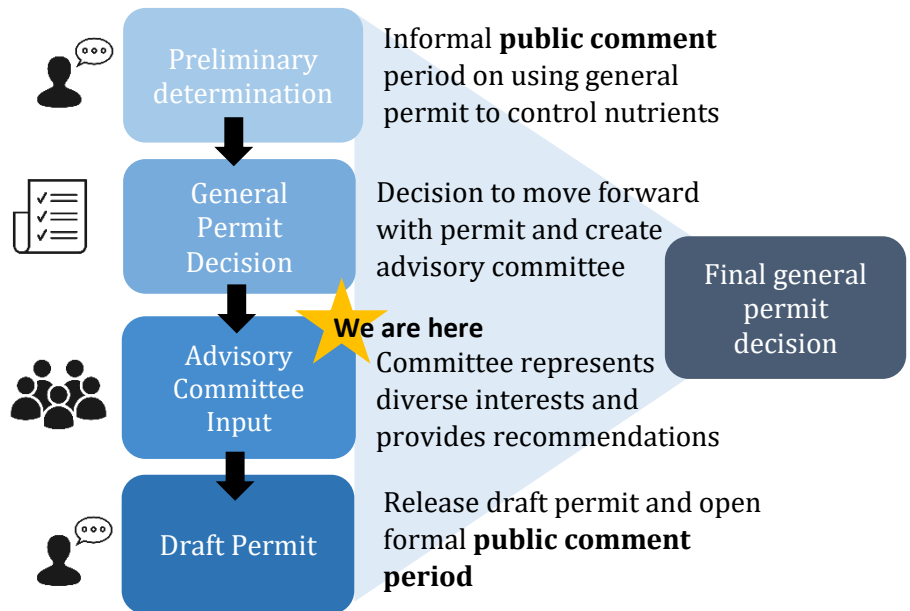
Since 2018, the Nutrient Forum, a group of stakeholders and Tribes, has met regularly to discuss, learn, and provide input on how to reduce human sources of nutrients. The Nutrients General Permit is one part of addressing excess nutrients in Puget Sound and the Permit Advisory Committee will work in tandem with the Forum. The [Nutrient Forum](#) will continue to be the space for addressing science, watershed sources of nutrients, nutrient reduction strategies, and other broader nutrient issues.



## Engaging with Interested Parties

Community engagement now and into the future is critical to drafting a robust general permit. We have several ways to engage with communities throughout the general permit development process. There are multiple opportunities for public comment and an advisory committee, designed to represent diverse stakeholders, will provide recommendations to Ecology to inform the draft permit.

## General Permit Development Process



## General Permit Advisory Committee

We convened a General Permit Advisory Committee to develop recommendations for general permit conditions. This Advisory Committee is comprised of regional WWTP representatives, State Agencies (including Ecology and Commerce), the EPA, the environmental community, and Tribes. Our Advisory Committee members bring a diverse array of concerns to the table: from salmon and orca recovery, to planning for smart growth, to costs to ratepayers, and all share a common commitment to ensuring a health Puget Sound.

Over the next year, this committee will develop a suite of recommendations that will ensure progress towards nutrient reduction during the first permit term, including how to curb (cap) excess nutrients while still allowing for growth. These final recommendations will inform permit conditions that will be released for public comment in a preliminary and then formal draft.

## How to stay informed and receive updates

All meeting schedules, agenda, meeting notes, and contacts for advisory committee members are posted on the [Puget Sound Nutrients General Permit webpage](#). To stay informed about the Nutrients General permit, please [sign up for our listserv](#).