

Septics Edition

First Flush, "tIssue" #1

Summer-Fall 2009

New State Rules for Septic Systems

As you may already be aware, there are serious water quality concerns for Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, including many water bodies in Clallam County. Often, septic systems are singled out as a major source of contamination, when – if properly designed and maintained – they can be the best way to treat and dispose of human waste in rural areas. On the other hand, septic systems that are not maintained can cause public health problems and pollute rivers, lakes, shellfish, and the groundwater we drink. Having septic systems checked or inspected on a regular basis can prevent failures, preserve and enhance water quality, and keep shellfish areas and drinking water sources safe from contamination. A well-maintained septic system also can save the homeowner lots of money by preventing costly repairs!

Two recent state laws are changing the way septic systems are managed in Washington State and in Clallam County. Regulation WAC 246-272A requires homeowners to inspect and maintain their septic system to ensure it is functioning properly. At a minimum, this means that an owner of a traditional *gravity* septic system must have it properly inspected at least once every 3 years. *Alternative* systems (those with pumps) must be inspected every year. Clallam County Environmental Health staff will be keeping records of all inspections, and the requirements will be enforced in phases over the next few years.

Another new state law (Chapter 70.118A RCW) requires counties to establish a Marine Recovery Area (MRA) where shellfish growing areas are closed (or if closure is likely), or where bacteria or nitrogen are seriously affecting water quality. Within Clallam County's MRA (see below), there

Did you know?

...liquid fabric softener is not good for septic systems. Think about it: if fabric softener fluffs up your towels, what does it do to toilet paper and poop? A fluffy, clean smelling septic tank is not normal!

are more specific septic inspection requirements which will be the topic of a future newsletter.

When the state legislature passed these laws it also required the twelve counties that border Puget Sound and the Strait to develop septic system management plans.

Introducing the first issue of the "Clean Water Herald: Septics Edition," mailed to all Clallam County septic system owners. These newsletters will focus on new regulations affecting septic owners, but we hope the information also serves to inspire good stewardship of our shared natural resources!

CONVENTIONAL GRAVITY SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Must be inspected at least once every three years.

PRESSURIZED ALTERNATIVE SEPTIC SYSTEMS (those with pumps)

Must be inspected EVERY year.

Clallam County recognized that these new laws would have a tremendous effect on rural homeowners, so Environmental Health invited stakeholders to help develop a plan to carry out the laws locally. This "Onsite Septic System Work Group," including representatives with a wide range of interests, met in 2006 and 2007 to develop recommendations for Clallam County. These are included in the Clallam County On-Site Septic System Management Plan, adopted by the Board of Health in June 2007. You may find the Management Plan and other workgroup records on the County's website at www.Clallam.net.

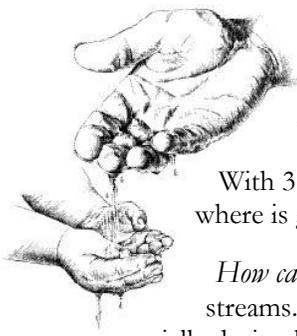
During the public process for finalizing Clallam County's Management Plan, many septic system owners expressed an interest in inspecting their own system. As a result of this feedback and at the workgroup's suggestion, Environmental Health is developing a "Do It Yourself" inspection training program to start in 2010. To be eligible for this training, homeowners will first need to attend a free "Septics 101" workshop, held monthly (see schedule on back). Check our next newsletter in December for more details regarding D.I.Y. inspection training!



"Marine Recovery Area" (MRA) for Clallam County

The MRA is located in eastern Clallam County as shown on this map. It was established for this area because parts of Dungeness Bay are currently closed for commercial and recreational shellfish gathering, and there are bacterial pollution problems in some of the streams that empty into the bays. Human waste, most likely from poorly functioning or failing septic systems, are contributing to these problems according to recent research.

New inspection rules apply to the whole state. This image of Clallam County shows where a "Marine Recovery Area" was established, in which specific requirements for the initial inspection apply.



The Water Column

Did you know? Especially in late summer, the water we use indoors and outdoors to drink, cook, clean, wash, and landscape with competes with the water fish need in rivers and streams to survive. With 3 kinds of salmon threatened with extinction in Clallam County, the need to conserve water everywhere is greater than ever.

How can water conservation help save fish? The more water people use, the less there is for fish in rivers and streams. Conserving water, especially outdoors, will help preserve the flow of water in rivers and streams, especially during late summer/early fall and other low-streamflow times. This will help returning fish swim upstream and young fish swim downstream, as well as improve spawning habitat and protect other wildlife.

How can I help? Water conservation techniques will help you save money as well as water resources. Properly using fertilizers and pesticides, or using natural pest control measures, also will help keep water clean. Conserving water and minimizing the use of harmful chemicals not only will save salmon and other wildlife, but protects the environment for all of us.

Watch for the latest messaging... we've all heard many times what to do: fix leaks, conserve, don't water the driveway, etc. Now we need reminders — Just Do It! To learn more about how you can conserve water and help wildlife, check out the new County webpage:
www.clallam.net/waterconservation/



Clean Water Herald—Septics Edition Summer-Fall 2009

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 Port Angeles, WA 98362



FALL CALENDAR

The Clean Water Herald is a periodic newsletter sponsored by members of the Clean Water Work Group, to inform and promote good stewardship of our shared natural resources.

The "**Septics Edition**" series will be published quarterly through 2011 by the helpful staff at Environmental Health Services, a division of the Clallam County Health & Human Services Department.

Contact us at the courthouse, 360-417-2332, or visit www.clallam.net/envhealth

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Dungeness River Festival	Sept. 25-26	10am-4pm	Dungeness River Audubon Center	Contact: 681-4076
Septics 101	Sept. 29	6-8:00 pm	Dungeness River Audubon Center	Contact: 417-2258
Farm Tour	Oct. 3	10am-4pm	8 farms between Agnew and Blyn	Contact: 417-2279
Dungeness Crab & Seafood Fest	Oct. 10-11	10am-8:30pm	Port Angeles City Pier	Contact: 452-6300
Septics 101	Oct. 20	6-8:00 pm	Dungeness River Audubon Center	Contact: 417-2258
Septics 101	Nov. 17	6-8:00 pm	Dungeness River Audubon Center	Contact: 417-2258
Septics 101	Dec. 10	6-8:00 pm	County Courthouse Room 160	Contact: 417-2258