

Raise the Grade –Swan Creek!

www.piercecountywa.org/watershedhealthdata

In late 2011, Pierce County Public Works and Utilities, Surface Water Management (SWM), initiated an effort aimed at improving the surface water quality of Minter Creek, Horn Creek, Swan Creek and Spanaway Lake.

Since 2008, Surface Water Management (SWM) has been tracking and reporting the water quality status of Pierce County waterbodies in an annual Watershed Health Report Card. Streams and lakes are *graded* on a scale of “F” (failing) to “A” (excellent) based on an index of water quality and biological indicators. Swan Creek received a “C-” grade in 2009 and 2010, and a “C” grade in 2011.

In addition to tracking water quality, SWM routinely inspects stormwater facilities for potential sources of pollution and rates their status of compliance with stormwater requirements. Facilities are *graded* on a scale of “1” (significant noncompliance) to “5” (exceeds requirements).

The goal of the **“Raise the Grade- Swan Creek” initiative** is to improve water quality so that the existing grade and the compliance rating of stormwater management facilities contributing pollutants to the creek, are improved (“raised”).

Current Watershed Health Status of Swan Creek

The low water quality grade for Swan Creek is due to high levels of fecal coliform, nitrogen and phosphorous, all of which can come from human and animal waste. In addition, Swan Creek is on the Washington State 303(d) list of polluted waters for fecal coliform. The Benthic Index of Biotic Integrity (BIBI) score for Swan Creek was 25.3 in 2011, a slight improvement over 2010, when it scored 24. The BIBI score is based on the types of bugs that live on the bottom of the creek - the types and amount of bugs can tell a lot about the health of a stream (BIBI is calculated using a running average over the last six years). Swan Creek’s BIBI Scores is considered poor.

In 2012, Pierce County Surface Water Management division began working to 'raise the grade' of Swan Creek. A project team set out to identify problems, partners, and solutions to improve water quality in Swan Creek. Our plans include meeting community members to find out their ideas about what is contributing to the water quality problems, supporting ongoing

stewardship efforts in the watershed, increasing water quality monitoring to identify potential pollution sources, habitat and stream process restoration, identifying problems with septic or sewer systems in the watershed, increasing education and outreach to watershed residents, and working with residents and business owners.

Summary of Actions and Plans for 2012-2013

- The Swan Creek Raise the Grade team is collaborating with, Tacoma/Pierce County Health Department, Pierce Conservation District, the City of Tacoma, Citizens for a Healthy Bay, the Puyallup River Watershed and Friends of the Swan Creek Watershed. We would like to continue to build partnerships with groups such as Drainage District No. 14, as well as residents of the watershed.
- We have collected baseline water quality data from three locations within the creek. We will continue to monitor those sites monthly, as well as after storm events to attempt to narrow down problem areas. We plan to analyze additional water quality parameters such as *E. Coli* and potentially microbial source tracking once we have water in the upper watershed again.
- We mailed a postcard introducing Raise the Grade to watershed residents in July 2012. In September 2012, we will begin to track and identify pollutant sources with a watershed-based sweep of land use activities and site conditions in the watershed. We plan to use the information to initiate pollutant source controls.
- We are currently planning a streamside community planting event for 2012 and plan to host another community event in 2013.
- Beginning in September, 2012 we will inspect private and public stormwater facilities in the watershed.
- We have interviewed Pierce County Public works about potential sewer line issues and hope to have similar conversations with the City of Tacoma.
- We hope to identify and repair failing septic systems
- We will explore actions in the Clarks Creek Basin Plan that we can implement.

Contact Information

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If you would like additional information or have questions, please contact Pierce County Public Works & Utilities, Surface Water Management (253) 798-2725; pcwater@co.pierce.wa.us.



Surface Water Management