STEWARDS OF THE LAKE

A Guide to Living in the Lake Whatcom Watershed
Dear Lake Whatcom watershed resident,

Our community is dedicated to protecting Lake Whatcom. The City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, and the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District work in close partnership to protect Lake Whatcom water quality and watershed health. Lake Whatcom is the drinking water source for more than 100,000 residents and a source of beauty and enjoyment for residents and visitors alike. In collaboration with local partners, we work hard to protect this treasured community resource. Our efforts build upon decades of action to safeguard the lake from land use impacts, pollutants and invasive species. Community efforts are essential to the protection of Lake Whatcom. As watershed residents, you play a unique role in the stewardship of the lake. Your daily actions—from caring for your yard to using watershed trails—have a collective impact on lake water quality. We want to provide you with the tools you need to be good stewards of the lake. We hope this stewardship guide helps you in your efforts to use watershed-friendly practices on the lake, at home, and out and about in our community. Thank you for your dedication to our cherished lake. Working together, we can ensure that Lake Whatcom continues to be a source of excellent drinking water and enjoyment for generations to come.

Seth Fleetwood, Mayor
City of Bellingham

Satpal Singh Sidhu, Executive
Whatcom County
PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDEBOOK

Lake Whatcom is a point of pride for city and county residents alike. Its stunning wildlife and scenery, recreational amenities and supply of drinking water inspire residents to do all they can to steward this invaluable resource. The purpose of this guidebook is to provide you with the information and resources you need to protect water quality and watershed health. Topics include invasive species, lake recreation, yard care, waste disposal, trail recreation and more. Whether you recently moved to the Lake Whatcom watershed or it is your lifelong home, we hope this guidebook serves as a useful reference for many years to come.

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Lake Whatcom has a long history of human use and development. Balancing human uses with environmental protection is a guiding principle of the Lake Whatcom Management Program.

Photo by Teagan Ward

Photo by Teagan Ward
Whatcom Cr.
Anderson Creek carries water diverted from the Middle Fork of the Nooksack River to Lake Whatcom.

Physical characteristics
- Lake Whatcom is about ten miles long and just over one mile wide at its widest point.
- Lake Whatcom's total shoreline is about 30 miles long.
- Lake Whatcom's surface area is about 5,000 acres with 92% outside of city limits.
- Lake Whatcom is made up of three distinct basins that hold about 250 billion gallons of water.
- Lake Whatcom's watershed covers about 56 square miles (36,000 acres) with 97% outside of city limits.
- Lake Whatcom is fed by 36 streams (many do not flow year-round). Major streams include Silver Beach, Carpenter, Olsen, Smith, Anderson, Brannian and Austin Creeks.
- Lake Whatcom also periodically receives water diverted from the Middle Fork of the Nooksack River by the City of Bellingham to meet water supply needs.
- The City of Bellingham controls lake level with a small dam at the outlet draining to Whatcom Creek. When the lake level reaches 314.94 feet above mean sea level the city is obligated to release water through this dam.
- Lake Whatcom's natural outflow is to Whatcom Creek and Bellingham Bay.
- Lake Whatcom's depth ranges from 15 feet deep to 334 feet deep.

Population and drinking water supply
- Lake Whatcom is the drinking water source for over 100,000 Whatcom County residents, which is about half the county's population.
- Lake Whatcom provides drinking water for the City of Bellingham, Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District, several smaller water districts and associations, and homes that draw water directly from the lake.
- The City of Bellingham withdraws water from the lake's middle basin through a 1,200-foot wooden pipeline. The water is piped to the water treatment plant in Whatcom Falls Park.
- About 18,000 people live in the Lake Whatcom watershed (2018 estimate).
- Approximately 25% of the watershed population lives within the City of Bellingham and approximately 75% live outside city limits in unincorporated Whatcom County.

The Lake Whatcom watershed covers about 56 square miles and is home to about 18,000 residents. (Photo by Teagan Ward)
LAKE WHATCOM IS A SPECIAL PLACE

Lake Whatcom is a vital resource, providing drinking water, recreation and wildlife habitat to our community.

Supplying drinking water
Lake Whatcom is the drinking water source for over 100,000 Whatcom County residents. The City of Bellingham, the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District, and other water purveyors work hard to ensure the water delivered to your tap is safe and reliable. Keeping water pollutants out of Lake Whatcom reduces treatment costs for water utilities. It also ensures clean water for households that directly withdraw drinking water from the lake.

Offering numerous recreational opportunities
Residents and visitors alike cherish the recreation—hiking, boating, fishing and more—Lake Whatcom and its watershed offer. Along with this enjoyment comes a great deal of responsibility to protect the water, shorelines and habitat of our valuable lake.

Supporting diverse fish and wildlife
The Lake Whatcom watershed is home to many types of fish, amphibians, birds and other wildlife. These species depend on the lake for clean water and plentiful food. This diversity is vital to the ecological health of the lake and its watershed.

Maintaining a special place in history
Industry, residential living, recreation and a diverse ecosystem have co-existed in the watershed for many generations. These often-competing uses have required creative and collaborative solutions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:
• Drinking water reports
• Parks and recreation
• Fish and wildlife
• Historical information

Winter brings dramatic and beautiful changes to Lake Whatcom. (Photo by Todd Edison)

Lake Whatcom is home to about 200 species of wildlife. (Photo by John Revard)

“I’ve sailed now for 50 years on Lake Whatcom and I’ve never lost the thrill of that. I love the ambiance, the feeling of relaxation and just love being on the water.”
—Sharon Hoofnagle, watershed resident
A plan to clean up Lake Whatcom is approved.

In 2016, Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham received approval from the WA Department of Ecology for a clean up plan to restore the lake’s water quality over the next 50 years. The plan builds on numerous ongoing programs and calls on homeowners and governments to work together to protect Lake Whatcom.

Photos:
(top) HIP homeowners with established native landscaping (2019, photo by Gabriella Mednick); (bottom) Upgrading a water treatment vault on Pullman Street (2018, photo by City of Bellingham staff)

Collaborative management of Lake Whatcom begins.

In 1992, local governments established a common goal for the Lake Whatcom watershed. In 1998, Lake Whatcom and its tributaries were designated as polluted by Washington State. In response, Whatcom County, the City of Bellingham, and the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District created the Lake Whatcom Management Program to cooperatively manage and protect Lake Whatcom.

Photo: Aerial of Lake Whatcom watershed (2014, photo by Katheryn Moran)

Logging was big business during the late 1800s.

Two lumber mills in Geneva processed timber cut from the watershed. Year in and year out, the logging camps and mills worked to convert the raw material of the forests into usable products, payrolls and growing communities.

Photos:
(top) Lake Whatcom watershed logging operations (1892, courtesy of Whatcom Museum); (bottom) Loggers with a giant cedar tree measuring over 20 feet in diameter (1907, photo by J.W. Sandison)

Water and sewer services expand in the watershed.

The Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District (originally Water District #10) was formed in 1968 to provide sewer service to many homes on septic systems around Lake Whatcom. Water and sewer service allowed neighborhoods around the lake to grow.

Photo: Crews install a new sewer pipe in the Geneva neighborhood, circa 1970, courtesy of Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District

SNAPSHOTS IN TIME

1890s

Lake Whatcom becomes a municipal drinking water source.

The Bellingham Bay Water Company used water from Whatcom Creek beginning in the 1880s to serve growing communities. In 1893, this water system was purchased by the newly formed City of New Whatcom and the water source shifted to Lake Whatcom.

Photo: Installation of a wooden intake pipe in the lake for municipal water supplies (1894, courtesy of Whatcom Museum)

1940s

Land use shifts from timber and mining to more diverse uses.

During the 1940s more homes and summer cottages were built around the northwestern parts of the lake. Residents enjoyed fishing, boating and swimming. By 1950 the lumber mills were mostly closed and mining activity ended.

Photo: Swimmers enjoy Bloedel Donovan Park (1950, photo by Jack Carver)

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Photo: Crees install a new sewer pipe in the Geneva neighborhood, circa 1970, courtesy of Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District

1980s

Water quality monitoring efforts increase.

Lake Whatcom water quality monitoring began in 1962. After decades of conversion of forests to neighborhoods, lake water quality concerns became more noticeable. In 1988, the City of Bellingham initiated a water quality monitoring program in partnership with Western Washington University (WWU).

Photo: Scientists from WWU collect a water quality sample from the lake (2019, courtesy of Western Washington University)

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The Lake Whatcom watershed is a place of change. Logging and mining transformed the old growth forests. Communities of homes, parks and roads transformed the clear cuts. These landscape changes contribute to increased stormwater runoff and degraded water quality in the lake. Early water quality concerns included sediment, sawdust and other pollutants associated with logging and sawmill operations. Today, concerns include pollutants and aquatic invasive species associated with residential development and recreational activities in the watershed.

Monitoring the lake
Lake Whatcom has been the subject of monitoring programs since the early 1960s. Current monitoring efforts include routine water quality testing in the lake and tributary streams and surveys for aquatic invasive species. These efforts identify water quality and watershed health concerns and help local governments determine how best to address these problems.

Identifying water quality problems
Lake Whatcom has two primary water quality problems:

• Too little dissolved oxygen in portions of the lake during the summer to support fish and other aquatic life.
• Too much fecal bacteria from human and animal poop in streams flowing into the lake.

These concerns triggered federal Clean Water Act requirements to develop a cleanup plan for Lake Whatcom, which was published in 2016.

Linking phosphorus and oxygen levels
Phosphorus is a naturally occurring nutrient found in water, soil and air. It is essential for animal and plant life. However, when too much phosphorus flows into the lake, it promotes excess algae growth. When algae die, they sink to the bottom of the lake and decompose. The decomposition process depletes dissolved oxygen in the lake. Algae can also affect drinking water taste and odors and increase water treatment costs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:

• Sources of phosphorus
• Lake Whatcom water quality monitoring reports
• Lake Whatcom tributary monitoring reports
• Lake Whatcom cleanup plan

Where is the phosphorus coming from?
Phosphorus comes from a variety of natural and human sources. It is an element found in all organic matter and soil. Phosphorus also dissolves in water, becoming an invisible pollutant. Common human-generated sources of phosphorus pollution in Lake Whatcom are:

• Dirt and sediment washed into the lake from bare soil or eroding streambanks.
• Yards including lawns, yard debris and fertilizers.
• Waste from pets, livestock and septic systems that are not functioning properly.
• Soaps and detergents that contain phosphorus.
Cleansing Lake Whatcom is more than just a good idea. The Washington State Department of Ecology requires local governments to take action to protect and improve water quality to meet important health and environmental standards. Funding for Lake Whatcom protection comes from a variety of local, state and federal sources.

The City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, and the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District started working together to protect Lake Whatcom in 1992. In 1998, these local governments formed the Lake Whatcom Management Program to coordinate programs and projects that restore, protect and preserve Lake Whatcom and its surrounding watershed.

Restoring water quality

The city and county build stormwater treatment facilities that filter pollutants like phosphorus and bacteria out of runoff before it enters the lake. These facilities are built in public road rights-of-way and other publicly-owned property. Crews regularly maintain these facilities and drainage systems to ensure they are working properly to clean and convey water.

Protecting the lake from new threats

The Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Program was launched in 2012 to prevent the introduction of harmful zebra mussels, quagga mussels and other invasive species to Whatcom County waters. If introduced, invasive mussels could damage water intake pipes, create hazards for swimmers, cause long-term taste and odor problems in our drinking water, and harm native aquatic species. Watercraft are inspected by staff prior to launching to ensure they do not spread invasive species to Lake Whatcom.

Preserving healthy watershed functions

Preserving land in its natural forested condition is an important part of what local government is doing to protect Lake Whatcom. Forested land soaks up and naturally filters runoff, reducing impacts to the lake from high flows and pollution. All City of Bellingham water customers pay a Lake Whatcom Watershed Land Acquisition and Preservation Program charge as part of their bill. These fees are used to purchase land, pay for conservation easements and restore the watershed’s protected lands.

Additional resources

Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org for more information about:
- Lake Whatcom Management Program
- Aquatic Invasive Species Program
- Stormwater Management Programs
- Land Acquisition and Preservation Program

Who do you call to report a stormwater facility maintenance need?

Stormwater facilities are structures that transport or treat stormwater runoff including ditches, catch basins, pipes, detention ponds and engineered treatment facilities like filter vaults or bioswales. Crews regularly maintain stormwater facilities to ensure they are working properly. To report a maintenance problem with a public stormwater facility or to request help maintaining a private facility like a stormwater pond call:

- Within city limits: City of Bellingham Stormwater Maintenance at (360) 778-7979
- Outside of city limits: Whatcom County Public Works Stormwater at (360) 778-6210

In 2015, the City of Bellingham installed infiltration systems underneath a sandy beach at Bloedel Donovan Park on the shoreline of Lake Whatcom. These filters capture and clean runoff from five acres of lawn, roof and pavement in the park, but don't interfere with beach enjoyment.

AIS program staff inspect boats to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species to Lake Whatcom. Whatcom Conservation Corps members work hard to remove invasive species to promote healthy forests in the Lake Whatcom watershed.

Filter cartridges housed in underground vaults are effective tools for cleaning stormwater runoff before it enters Lake Whatcom. The cartridges are packed with filtering materials designed to remove pollutants like phosphorus. Filters are replaced regularly to ensure optimal performance. Vaults are installed in strategic locations to capture and clean as much stormwater as possible.
While local governments are doing their best to restore, protect and preserve the lake and its watershed, these efforts are limited to public road rights-of-way and other publicly-owned property. On privately owned property, watershed residents play a critical role in the protection of Lake Whatcom. The choices you make about routine tasks like yard work, pet care and vehicle maintenance have a direct impact on the amount of pollution that is carried by stormwater runoff to the lake. Proactive stewardship by all residents, even those who don’t own a pet or use phosphorus-containing products, is necessary to reverse the trend of our lake’s declining water quality.

Learn more about how you can help in the following sections:

- On the Lake: page 19
- At Home: page 22
- Out and About: page 31

You play a crucial role in helping the lake

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are non-native plants, animals and pathogens that live primarily in water and can thrive in new environments. Once established, they are extremely costly to manage. AIS can reduce your property values, damage your watercraft and docks, create taste and odor issues in your drinking water, and make your beaches hazardous and uninviting. AIS can spread by hitching a ride on watercraft, gear, waders and even the family dog. By inspecting all watercraft before they launch, the Lake Whatcom Management Program aims to prevent the spread of AIS to Lake Whatcom—an important step in protecting the lake and your property from very costly and irreversible impacts.

Additional resources
Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:

- Boat inspections
- Invasive plants and animals
- Invasive species reporting

How can you keep Aquatic Invasive Species out of the lake?

- Get your watercraft permitted and inspected. Check stations are located at Bloedel Donovan, Sudden Valley Marina and South Bay boat launches. Check the AIS website at www.whatcomboatinspections.com for more information about permit requirements.
- Schedule an onsite visit. If you have multiple watercraft or are unable to trailer your watercraft to a check station, you can call (360) 778-7975 to schedule an inspection at your home.
- Clean, drain, and dry your boat. Ensure your watercraft and gear are cleaned, drained and dried before you visit another waterbody. That means no plants, mud, animals or standing water!
- Report unusual plants and animals. Keep a lookout for any unusual plants or animals along the shoreline. If you see something, report it online at the Washington Invasive Species Council’s website at invasive.species.wa.gov or call the AIS hotline at (360) 778-7975.
Getting out on the water is a great way to appreciate Lake Whatcom’s beauty. Please recreate responsibly to protect the lake and your family’s health. Be sure to respect private property along the shoreline.

**Boating**

Both motorized and non-motorized boats are popular options on the lake. If you use a motorized boat, here are some ways you can protect the lake for everyone’s enjoyment.

- **Use a four-stroke engine.** Carbureted two-stroke engines may discharge up to 20-30 percent of their fuel, unburned, into the air and water. Local laws prohibit the use of all carbureted two-stroke engines to protect lake water quality.
- **Watch your wake.** Limit your speed to 6 mph within 300 feet of the shore to reduce erosion caused by your boat wake. Erosion can damage the lake ecosystem and lakeside properties.

**Fishing**

The fish in Lake Whatcom are both native and introduced. Species include kokanee salmon, cutthroat trout, largemouth bass and smallmouth bass. Some types of fish in Lake Whatcom contain elevated levels of mercury. Fish consumption advisories are in place to protect human health (see table on next page). While there is no detectable amount of mercury in treated drinking water or in lake water, mercury can build up in the tissues of large fish.

**Swimming**

There are many great places to swim at Lake Whatcom, but as the lake gets more crowded on busy summer days, it’s important to stay safe. Tell a friend about your plans before swimming or boating. Know your swimming limitations, watch for hazards in the water and always check depth before diving in.

**Algae Blooms**

If you see green, blue-green, brown or reddish-green algae on the lake, don’t touch it or let dogs drink it. Please report it to the Whatcom County Health Department at (360) 778-6000. Scientists can post warning signs if they determine there is a danger to swimmers or pets.

**Additional Resources**

Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:

- Fish consumption advisories
- Boat rules and safety

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**Lake Whatcom Fish Advisories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Smallmouth Bass</th>
<th>Largemouth Bass</th>
<th>Yellow Perch</th>
<th>Brown Bullhead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women of childbearing age</strong></td>
<td>Do not eat.</td>
<td>Don't eat more than two meals* per month.</td>
<td>Don't eat more than one meal* per week.</td>
<td>Don't eat more than four meals* per month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children younger than age 6</strong></td>
<td>Do not eat.</td>
<td>Don't eat more than two meals* per month.</td>
<td>Don't eat more than one meal* per week.</td>
<td>Don't eat more than four meals* per month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other people</strong></td>
<td>No restriction.</td>
<td>No restriction.</td>
<td>No restriction.</td>
<td>No restriction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Meal size ranges: One ounce for a 25-pound child, three ounces for a 70-pound child, six ounces for women weighing less than 135 pounds, eight ounces for larger adults. From Whatcom County Health Department and Washington State Department of Health.
The City of Bellingham and Whatcom County's work to restore, protect and preserve Lake Whatcom is limited to streets, rights-of-way, parks and other public property. As a watershed resident, you are in a unique position to improve lake health by engaging in lake-friendly practices and projects on your property. Residential stewardship is essential to ensure a healthy lake for all to use and enjoy. Check out the following pages for more information about stewardship practices at home:

• Finding and Reporting Spills: page 23
• Working in Your Yard: page 24
• Working on Your Home: page 26
• Managing Household Chemicals: page 28
• Maintaining Your Vehicles: page 29
• Caring for Your Pet: page 30

Do you withdraw your water directly from Lake Whatcom?

Yes, small actions add up. Lakes and streams can be extremely sensitive to small amounts of pollution in runoff. For example, lake algae only need about one thousandth the amount of phosphorus your lawn needs to grow. And there are many potential sources of phosphorus and other pollutants in your yard. Your efforts at home to improve water quality may seem small, but they make a meaningful contribution to lake protection.

YOU PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN HELPING THE LAKE
AT HOME: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Spills happen. Help us find them. If you observe a spill or polluted water entering a ditch, drain, creek or the lake, please report it. Common types of spills and polluted water include:

• Oil and other vehicle fluids
• Muddy water from a construction site
• Dirty car wash water
• Dirty pressure wash water
• Fertilizer or fertilizer residue, including fertilizer pellets left on pavement
• Pesticides or pesticide residue
• Pet waste or RV/trailer waste
• Paint
• Other chemicals or hazardous materials

Both City of Bellingham and Whatcom County staff will respond to reports during regular business hours. For after-hours hazardous material spills call 911.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:

• City of Bellingham spill reporting
• Whatcom County spill reporting
• What to do if you cause a spill

Report spills and polluted water that are entering a ditch, drain or waterbody.
There is a deep connection between activities in your yard and water quality in the lake. Everything on the ground—from fallen leaves, grass clippings and pet waste to fertilizers and herbicides—can be carried by stormwater runoff into the lake (see illustration on page 14). These materials contain phosphorus, which feeds algae growth and contributes to low dissolved oxygen levels in the lake. Here are some ways you can prevent pollutants in your yard from reaching Lake Whatcom.

### Ensuring your fertilizer does not contain phosphorus
Local laws prohibit the use of lawn fertilizers containing phosphorus. If you do use fertilizers, always doublecheck that they contain zero phosphorus and follow application directions closely.

### Decreasing yard chemicals
Whether you care for your yard yourself or hire someone else to do it, consider reducing or eliminating pesticide and herbicide use. These products may contain toxic chemicals harmful to fish, wildlife and water quality. Always follow label instructions to minimize risks. Consider using less toxic alternatives such as plant-based products.

### Reducing the impact of your lawn
Even without fertilizer, lawns export phosphorus to the lake. Their shallow roots do a poor job of soaking up water and using nutrients. Rainwater flows off lawns in the top few inches of soil, taking phosphorus and other pollutants downhill toward the lake. You can help by replacing unused lawn area with native landscaping.

### Cleaning the polluted runoff from your property with HIP
In addition to preventing pollution, there are many ways to clean runoff from your yard before it reaches the lake. In some neighborhoods, funding and technical assistance are available to help property owners install voluntary water quality improvement projects through the Homeowner Incentive Program (HIP). Projects can include native landscaping, rain gardens or underground pollution filters. Options vary depending on your property’s location and its potential to impact water quality.

### Are you properly disposing of your grass clippings?
Grass clippings contain high levels of phosphorus. Follow these simple guidelines to keep this phosphorus out of Lake Whatcom:

- **Minimize lawn clippings** by reducing lawn area, mowing at a high setting and allowing lawns to go dormant in the summer.
- **Never dump grass clippings** in or near drainage ditches or water.
- **Compost grass clippings offsite** at a local disposal facility when possible.

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**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**
Visit [www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide](http://www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide) for more information about:

- Natural yard care
- Watershed gardening guidance
- Homeowner Incentive Program (HIP)
As a Lake Whatcom watershed resident, your home improvement projects can affect the lake. Projects like installing a patio, building a shed or adding on to your home can change how water runs off your property. Cumulative impacts from many small projects throughout a neighborhood add up.

Both the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County have special regulations in place to protect water quality in Lake Whatcom. These regulations apply to many different types of home improvement and landscaping projects. Here are some examples of typical projects that may trigger these special regulations:

- Additions onto existing buildings
- New construction of buildings or structures like decks
- New hard surfaces made of gravel, pavers or pavement
- Replacement of hard surfaces like driveways or parking areas
- Replacement of existing landscape or lawn with a new surface like a sports court, or even new landscaping or lawn
- Fence or retaining wall installation
- New dock installation or replacement
- Grading or flattening of your yard by stripping off vegetation and moving soil
- Berm construction

Specific rules and regulations vary based on what type of project you are doing and whether your property is located inside or outside of the city limits. Your property’s proximity to the lake, a stream or a wetland also determines what types of regulations and permits apply.

Before starting any home improvement project, please contact the appropriate permit center listed below and ask about specific requirements for your project. Permit office staff can also help you understand applicable regulations, determine if you live inside city limits and help you with your application.

For residents living within city limits:
City of Bellingham Permit Center
City Hall
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 778-8300
permits@cob.org

For residents living outside of city limits:
Whatcom County Planning and Development Services Permit Center
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226
(360) 778-5900
pds@co.whatcom.wa.us

Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:
- City of Bellingham Permit Center
- Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
- Septic system maintenance

Do you have a septic system?
As a septic system owner, you are responsible for evaluating and maintaining your system to make sure it is working properly. Properly working and maintained systems protect public health by keeping sewage out of the lake and save you money by avoiding costly repairs. Gravity systems need to be evaluated every three years. All other systems need to be evaluated annually.

Help is available! Learn more at www.whatcomcounty.us/septic or call the Whatcom County Health Department at (360) 778-6000.

When are you allowed to move or expose soil?
There is a watershed work window from June 1 to September 30 in the Lake Whatcom watershed. Ground disturbing activities must take place during these dry season months. This reduces the chance of rainwater washing soil particles containing phosphorus into the lake.

You play a crucial role in helping the lake at home: working on your home

Evaluation
Your current home and yard projects may need a permit to ensure lake protection. Always check with your permit center before starting a project.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:
- City of Bellingham Permit Center
- Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
- Septic system maintenance
YOU PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN HELPING THE LAKE

AT HOME: MANAGING HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS

Using and storing chemicals
Almost every household contains products that can potentially harm human health or the environment. Protect your family, neighborhood and Lake Whatcom with these use and storage tips:

✓ Store household chemicals in a secure, dry location out of reach of children and pets.
✓ Store products in a secondary container like a plastic bin with a secure lid to prevent accidental spills.
✓ Read labels carefully and follow directions for use and clean up.
✓ Choose non-toxic or less-toxic products whenever possible.

Disposing of chemicals
The best way to dispose of household chemicals depends on the product. Remember that chemicals should never be poured down a storm drain. Here are some guidelines for typical household products:

✓ Medicine—learn where to get rid of your old meds quickly, safely and easily with the Whatcom Med Return program.
✓ Paint clean up—oil-based products and solvents can be taken to the Disposal of Toxics facility. For latex paints, wash water can go down the drain to the sewer. If you have a septic system, put the wash water in a container to evaporate. Containers with dried latex paint can go in the trash.
✓ Motor oil—properly store used motor oil in a sealed, labeled container and discard it at the Disposal of Toxics facility or participating automotive parts stores.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:
• Whatcom Med Return program
• Disposal of Toxics Facility
• Whatcom County Health Department

Where can you get rid of household chemicals safely?
The Disposal of Toxics Facility accepts household hazardous waste at 3505 Airport Drive in Bellingham. For an updated list of accepted products and hours visit www.whatcomcounty.org/833/ or call (360) 380-4640.

YOU PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN HELPING THE LAKE

AT HOME: MAINTAINING YOUR VEHICLES

Most watershed residents rely on personal vehicles for daily transportation. Cars, trucks and other vehicles can be sources of heavy metals, oil and grease that threaten lake water quality. If you wash your vehicle at home, the dirty wash water can carry these pollutants and detergents to drainage systems flowing into the lake.

To limit your vehicle’s impact on Lake Whatcom water quality:

✓ Use a commercial car wash where wash water is cleaned.
✓ Allow wash water to soak into the lawn if you wash your car at home.
✓ Check for vehicle leaks and repair leaks quickly.

Proper maintenance of your boat is also necessary to reduce impacts on Lake Whatcom. How and where you take care of your boat is an important consideration.

✓ Maintain your boat away from the lake, its tributaries and storm drains.
✓ Use a fuel collar when fueling the boat near the lake; keep absorbent pads onboard for even the smallest spills.
✓ Contain any excess waste products that result from your work and dispose of them properly.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:
• Fixing car leaks
• Whatcom Smart Trips program
• WTA bus schedules

Did you know that driving less protects the lake?

Driving less in the watershed helps keep the lake clean. Even one less trip means fewer pollutants on roads that are washed into the lake during the next rainstorm. Here are some ways to reduce your trips in and out of the watershed:

• Plan ahead to combine errands into a single trip.
• Talk to your neighbors about carpooling to school or work.
• Take the bus when possible.
• Sign up for Whatcom Smart Trips and get rewarded for your efforts!

You can use a commercial car wash to ensure pollutants are not washed into Lake Whatcom. Work with your mechanic to fix leaks quickly to keep oil and other pollutants out of the lake. Disposing of chemicals is crucial to maintaining a clean lake.
Dogs, cats and other pets are beloved companions. Along with the joy our animals bring is the responsibility to pick up their poop both at home and on walks. An estimated 4,000 dogs live in the Lake Whatcom watershed, which create over 1,300 pounds of poop each day. Dog poop is raw sewage that can spread diseases to people and pets. It also contains nutrients like phosphorus that fuel algae growth in the lake.

To protect family and lake health, scoop the poop, bag it and put it in the trash. The City of Bellingham and Whatcom County require owners to clean up after their pets. Regulations also prohibit chickens and other livestock in the Lake Whatcom watershed. Wildlife such as deer, raccoons and geese can also produce unhealthy levels of poop if their populations are concentrated. Human interactions with wildlife, such as providing easy sources of food and shelter, can increase populations above natural levels. Never feed wildlife and keep trash and pet food tightly sealed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:
• City and county pet waste programs
• Living with wildlife guidance

Residents love living in the Lake Whatcom watershed for many reasons. Chief among them is the great access to recreation. Park and trail usage is increasing as the population of Whatcom County grows. Special care is needed to ensure these places are protected for future generations. Here are some ways you can help:

Pick up after your pets. Dispose of poop in the trash or carry it out.
Respect private property. Observe all posted signs. Many residents live directly along trails or near trailheads.
Share the trail. Hikers yield to horses. Mountain bikers yield to all other user groups.
Stay on designated trails. Protect water quality from the impacts of erosion.
Pack it in, pack it out. Carry out trash to keep trails and the lake litter-free.
Avoid disturbing wildlife. Keep the watershed a safe place for all wildlife species.
Park in designated parking areas at trailheads. Avoid blocking homes and driveways.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Visit www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org/guide for more information about:
• City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation
• Whatcom County Parks and Recreation

Where can you explore in the watershed?
There are many parks and trails to explore in the Lake Whatcom watershed. Please plan ahead. Not all locations have bathroom facilities, pet waste stations and trash cans. Check out the map on the inside cover of this book for the following park and trailhead locations:
• Lake Whatcom Park
• Simpson Family Nature Reserve
• Lookout Mountain Forest Preserve
• Blesed Overton Park
• Euclid Park (no facilities)

(Photos by Linda Wright)