

ABSTRACT

**BANG FOR THE BUCK: BETTER TARGETING
OF PUBLIC EDUCATION EFFORTS**

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The thousands of small decisions made every day by streamside residents will determine the success of any long-term water quality or habitat recovery program. Water quality and aquatic habitat are threatened, not by one big problem, but by a century of small individual actions. By recognizing and engaging the ability of citizens to impact watershed health we can prevent, rather than mitigate, water quality degradation.

A principal component of the Snohomish County Washington's Surface Water Management Division (SWM) strategy is to empower citizens to be active water resource stewards. With funding from the Washington State Department of Ecology Centennial Clean Water Fund, SWM conducted survey and focus group research to provide a basis for outreach programming and to gain a deeper understanding of the people who live in Snohomish County's watersheds. Specifically, the research examined 1) how staff can best reach watershed residents with information and educational messages, 2) how that information is translated into behavioral change, 3) how to support residents in adopting watershed-friendly behaviors and lifestyles, and 4) how to measure behavioral change.

SWM then focused on the 53% of the population that the research identified as "ready and willing" to take individual actions to protect rivers and streams. The research identified demographic characteristics that allow, through conventional marketing methods, the identification of people fitting the Ready and Willing profile. By overlapping those demographic characteristics with GIS parcel data, a population of Ready and Willing streamside landowners can be identified. For example, within a specific geographic area, the typical Ready and Willing individual might be a mother under 50 years old with a college education and a home along a Class 3 stream.

From that Ready and Willing population, a group of 600 streamside landowners were identified for study purposes. This group was divided into six "Target Audiences", each with specific demographic characteristics i.e., frequent voters, children in household, purchased outdoor recreation products, etc. Each Target Audience received a series of direct mail pieces intended to establish brand recognition for SWM, promote Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality and aquatic habitat, and encourage landowners to contact SWM staff for a voluntary site visit. Once invited to visit a streamside property, SWM staff engaged the landowner in a discussion of BMPs tailored to that individual and property. A Home*A*Syst type BMP evaluation was used to provide a benchmark to measure individual change. Streamside residents are encouraged to participate in SWM educational programs, such as Streamside Landowner Workshops.

Landowner response to direct mail, Target Audience response, staff contact, and BMP implementation are monitored and evaluated. Future message development and audience targeting will be influenced by the response from the six Target Audiences. Functional components of the program will later be incorporated into SWM outreach programs countywide. Through the program, SWM hopes to cultivate higher interest levels, within specific groups of residents that fall within the Ready and Willing category. The goal is to motivate changes in personal behavior patterns to improve water quality and aquatic habitat.