



Guiding Growth—Healthy Watersheds

Translating Science into Local Policy

Black Lake Basin



What's this project? Thurston County and the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) are working to use watershed science to create local policies that protect Puget Sound water quality. This project is funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and focuses on select watersheds draining into Puget Sound, including the Black Lake Basin [See map to the right].

Why plan today? A project goal is to identify basin management strategies that will help to preserve water resources in areas impacted by urban development, farming, ranching and other activities. TRPC estimates that Thurston County — one of the state's fastest-growing counties — will add about 140,000 people during the next three decades.

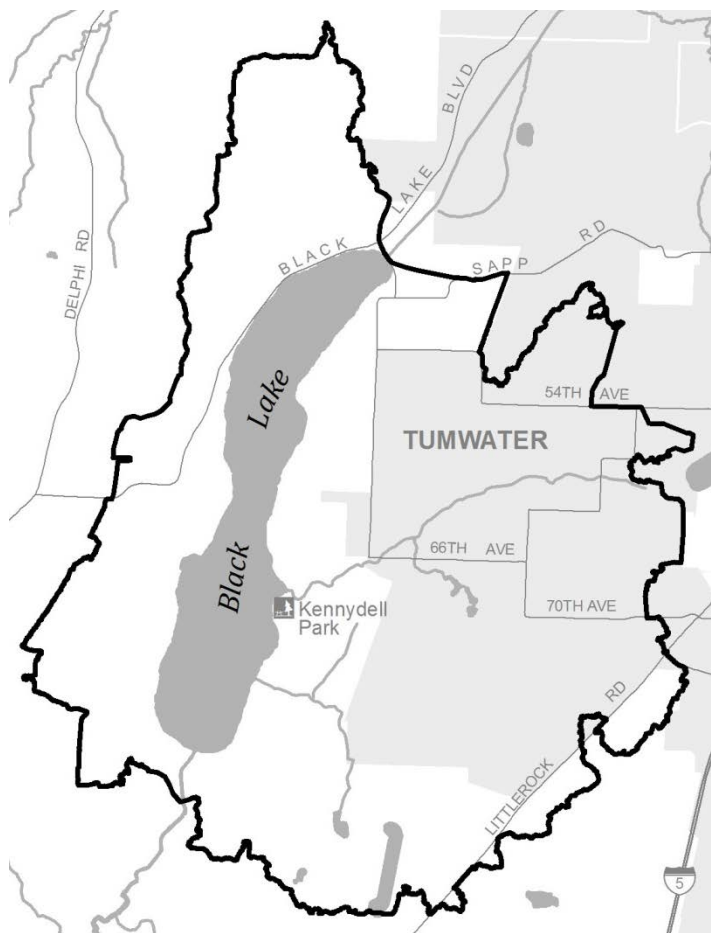
What's at stake? Development in sensitive areas can damage or disrupt ecosystem services, including the filtering and purification of water, regulation of water flows, protection from floods, and creation of habitat for plants and animals. Careless development in such areas could lead to lakes, streams, and beaches that are unhealthy and unusable for people and wildlife.

Why was this basin selected? The Black Lake Basin includes almost 5,000 acres that drain into one of the largest lakes in Thurston County. Historically, the lake was the headwaters of the Black River system, but since the excavation of the Black Lake Ditch in 1922, it has been hydrologically linked to Percival Creek and drains into Budd Inlet. The basin is impacted by development, with 8 percent of the basin covered by impervious surfaces (e.g., roads and parking lots) and just 44 percent remaining tree canopy. Algal blooms are a recurring and increasing problem in Black Lake. Meanwhile, Black Lake Ditch, which drains the lake at its northern end, violates fecal coliform and dissolved oxygen standards. Though the broader basin is relatively healthy today, future development could increase the amount of impervious surfaces and stormwater runoff, exacerbating water quality issues.

What's been done so far? This project focuses on preventing basins in relatively good condition — yet facing development pressure — from becoming degraded. Our first step was to understand the current condition of basins by examining scientific and monitoring data and growth patterns. We then considered how different management strategies might affect the basins' flow and water quality in the future.

What's next? We are seeking public input to help identify a management strategy for the Black Lake Basin and two other basins. Policies under consideration include changes to development regulations and zoning, transfer or purchase of development rights, and long-term protection of sensitive lands.

Want to learn more? Contact Thurston County Associate Planner Allison Osterberg: (360) 754-3355, x7011; osterba@co.thurston.wa.us. Project website: www.co.thurston.wa.us/planning/watershed



What does the survey show?

An August 2013 survey¹ conducted by TRPC shows what residents and property owners value most about the Black Lake Basin.

Ranking highest were having the ability to experience the natural environment, as well as having the opportunity for a rural lifestyle. Clean drinking water, swimmable lakes and streams, and Puget Sound water quality are all issues that are very important to respondents.

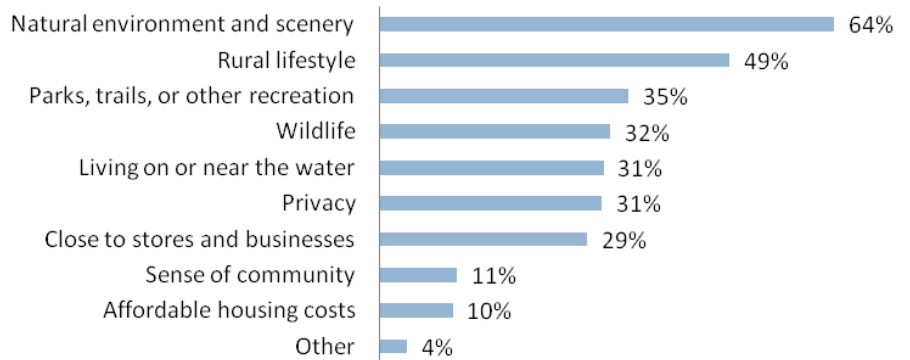
More than half of those who responded (69%) indicated that they are somewhat or very concerned about water quality in the basin. The greatest risks to water quality they see are urban development, as well as pollution from stormwater runoff and septic systems.

When it comes to planning for the future of the basin, residents noted that the most important issues to address were:

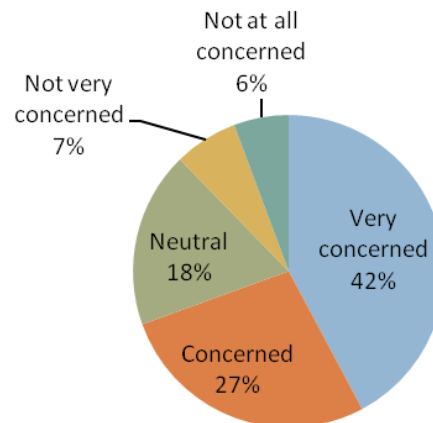
- Protecting water quality (58%);
- Protecting wildlife and fish habitat (44%);
- Preserving farmland and agriculture (28%);
- Improving water quality (27%); and,
- Encouraging low-impact development (27%).

When asked how they would like to describe the Black Lake Basin in the future, many residents expressed hope that water quality will be much improved, and that they and their children or grandchildren would be able to swim and fish safely in the lake. Several residents expressed a desire that there be greater monitoring and treatment of septic tanks. Finally, there is a desire to maintain the semi-rural, quiet aspect of the area while enhancing recreational opportunities around Black Lake.

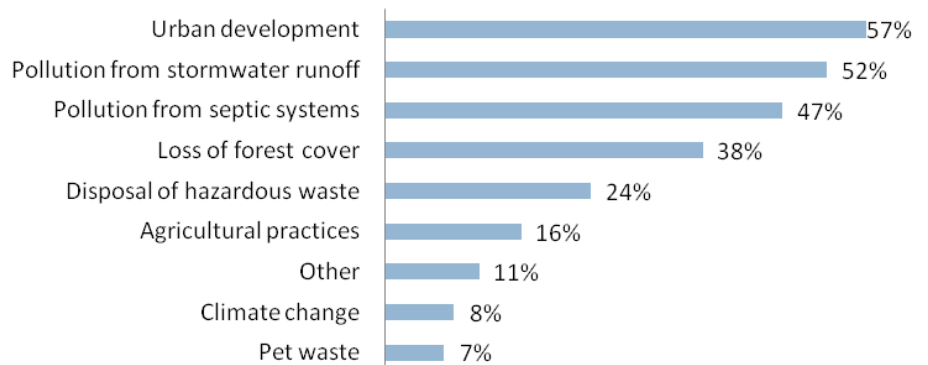
What do you value most about living in the Black Lake Basin?



How concerned are you about water quality in Black Lake Basin?



What are the greatest risks to water quality in Black Lake Basin?



¹ TRPC sent the survey to 2,293 residents and property owners and elicited a response rate of 15 percent.