



Program Overview for Whatcom County

What is HIP?

The Lake Whatcom Homeowner Incentive Program (HIP) is a coordinated City of Bellingham and Whatcom County non-regulatory program that reduces phosphorus pollution in Lake Whatcom. HIP provides free technical assistance and financial reimbursement for voluntary water quality improvement projects on properties within the Lake Whatcom watershed.

Who is eligible to participate in HIP?

All homeowners with property in the Lake Whatcom watershed that does not meet current stormwater management standards may participate in HIP. Current county code standards were approved in August 2013. Staff will confirm eligibility with each interested homeowner. Other property types (e.g., schools, condos, mobile home parks) may also participate in HIP. All property types follow the same program rules.

What's new in 2021?

Whatcom County is offering a revised HIP for county homeowners starting in 2021. Changes to the program in the county include:

- An expanded program area to include the entire Lake Whatcom watershed.
- A single version of HIP for all eligible properties instead of the two-track program offered from 2017-2020.
- Flexibility to use the HIP reimbursement budget for labor—Homeowners can choose how to manage their reimbursement budget and contribute to their project. You can do the work yourself and limit your out of pocket expenses (often to zero!) or hire help to install your project and end up contributing some financially.
- A native landscaping focus with options for other types of water quality improvement projects if they work for your site.
- Owners of shoreline property that drains directly to the lake have the option to complete a larger project with additional program requirements.

How does HIP work?

Here are the basics of how HIP works and the program requirements.

- Homeowners receive free technical assistance from Whatcom Conservation District (WCD) staff. Staff are available to help throughout the entire process.
- HIP projects are limited to the following types of water quality improvements: native landscaping, dispersion systems into native landscaping, underground filters (i.e., media filter drains), infiltration trenches, and rain gardens.
 - Native landscaping is the primary type of project and a good option available for all properties.
 - Homeowners interested in other types of projects can consult with WCD staff, and staff will determine if other types of water quality improvement projects are feasible and recommended. Not all project types are suitable for all locations.
- The minimum project size is 1,000 square feet or 25% of the property's improvable area, whichever is smallest. Improvable area is area not already in native landscaping, forest, or directed to a stormwater management facility. For most properties the minimum size is 1,000 square feet.
- The reimbursement budget is \$1.30/square foot of area improved up to a maximum of \$8,000. Homeowners pay costs upfront and apply for reimbursement after their project is installed.
- Homeowners agree to maintain their project and complete annual self-inspection and maintenance reports through a signed and notarized maintenance agreement.
- Shoreline property owners can choose to complete larger projects with no maximum reimbursement budget and an easement and maintenance agreement.

How do I get started?

Visit www.lakewhatcomhip.org and check your address to see if your property qualifies. Complete a short online form. WCD staff will follow up with you to answer your questions and help you start planning a project.

Questions

Contact Ryan O'Connor, Lake Whatcom HIP Coordinator at the Whatcom Conservation District at (360) 306-4701 or roconnor@whatcomcd.org.