

Stream Team

SPRING 2026

Restoring the Land, One Pasture at a Time

*Adopt-A-Drain! Prevent Flooding
& Protect Local Waterways*

EDUCATE • PROTECT • RESTORE
OLYMPIA • LACEY • TUMWATER • THURSTON COUNTY

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Did You Know? Articles marked with a damselfly icon, like the one on the left, will be posted on our website in the Reference Library.

Adopt-A-Drain! Prevent Flooding & Protect Local Waterways

The Adopt-A-Drain program is now live in Lacey and Olympia.

Did you know storm drains carry stormwater directly to local lakes, rivers, and oceans, often without any filtration? Stormwater is the leading source of pollution in the Salish Sea. Puget Sound Partnership's 2017 State of the Sound report estimated that about 75% of pollution in the Salish Sea comes from stormwater. It's important to keep storm drains clear of leaves, trash, and other pollutants for cleaner and healthier waterways.

Join your neighbors in preventing flooding and water pollution by adopting a drain today!

Here's how the program works:

- 1 Sign up online.**
Visit wa.adopt-a-drain.org to find and adopt a storm drain near you. Don't forget to give your drain a fun name!
- 
- 2 Keep your storm drain clear.**
Using a broom or rake, clean the top of the storm drain and the surrounding area. Do not remove the grate or try to clean the inside.
- 3 Track your impact.**
Enter the estimated total of debris you collect into your online account to track your impact.
- 4 We'll mail you a yard sign.**
Post a sign in your yard to inspire neighbors to join you in preventing flooding and water pollution.



Every day small actions like cleaning a storm drain add up to make a big difference.

Stream Team Updates

At Stream Team, each coordinator plays a unique and exciting role in bringing quality educational and stewardship opportunities to our community. What you experience at our events is the result of countless hours spent planning, coordinating, and refining how we deliver hands-on science, community engagement, and meaningful volunteer opportunities across Thurston County.

Stream Team is growing. Thanks to the continued partnership between Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater, and Thurston County, and the passion of our incredible community, our outreach and stewardship efforts across the South Sound are leading to real, visible progress. Your involvement helps protect and restore the places we all treasure, from neighborhood streams to the waters of the Salish Sea.

While our core schedule is set annually, we're taking some additional time this year to listen, reflect, and refocus our goals. This intentional pause allows us to strengthen our programs and ensure we're creating the very best experiences and resources for our community—now and into the future.

You may have noticed some changes lately, and we want to reassure you that this is a temporary shift rooted in long-term improvement. We are committed to being transparent about what's changing for 2026 and beyond, and to shaping these updates with community input at the center.

Growing Together & Shaping What's Next

What We're Working On

Newsletter

We're testing a biannual newsletter schedule (two issues per year) instead of quarterly and will revisit this approach as we go. This change allows us to focus on the quality of our newsletters and hone our outreach efforts to enhance accessibility and reach more people across Thurston County. We're also inviting new community voices to contribute stories, offering a broader range of perspectives on water quality and stewardship in the south Salish Sea.



Stream Bug Monitoring (BIBI)

Our BIBI training program is being redesigned, and we're reviewing and organizing our historical data. Dedicated BIBI volunteers are encouraged to reach out about early spring volunteer opportunities. In-person programming will return in 2027, enriched with new online classroom features!

Website

The Stream Team website is being upgraded to improve accessibility, style, and overall user experience. Our Resource Library is also being refreshed to make it easier to browse and to highlight updated, relevant content.



Social Media

If you've followed us in 2025, you've already seen some changes. Expect more engaging content—especially short videos—that explore the interconnected world of stormwater and how it affects our communities!



Facebook



Instagram



YouTube

Community Action Initiatives

All four Stream Team jurisdictions have launched, or will soon launch, new programs targeting specific stormwater concerns. Thurston County and Tumwater are focusing on Natural Yard Care, while Lacey and Olympia are emphasizing the Adopt-a-Drain program. We'll be creating new webpages and social media content to help you stay informed and get involved.

We Need Your Input!

Your voice plays an essential role in guiding these changes. By taking a short survey, you can help us better understand what inspires you, what you value most in the Stream Team newsletter, and how we can improve our content and outreach across the region.

Share your thoughts—take our survey!



Your feedback will directly shape future stories, programs, and resources we share. Our goal is for every Stream Team newsletter to leave you feeling informed, inspired, and connected—to our waterways, our communities, and the actions we can take together to protect the waters of the South Sound.

Please visit bit.ly/streamteamquiz to take the survey and share your thoughts. Thank you for being part of this work and for helping shape the future of Stream Team.



Restoring the Land, One Pasture at a Time

Spring in South Thurston County arrives with rain, soft ground, and the new growth of a landscape waking up. Water moves across fields and pastures, making its way into the creeks and rivers that tie our region together.

Out here, stormwater doesn't disappear into pipes or drains. It follows the shape of the land, carrying whatever the soil releases along the way—fine sediment, nutrients, the residue of winter. With nothing to catch it, the land decides what happens next. Where soil is healthy and roots run deep, water slows, filters through living ground, and moves on cleaner than it began.

Across South County, these outcomes are shaped by everyday choices made on working lands. At Tracking Y Ranch, those decisions are quietly playing out one pasture at a time.

Built from the Ground Up

Meet Tracking Y Ranch, a small, family-run operation in Thurston County built almost entirely on land the ranchers do not own. As first-generation ranchers in Western Washington, Tracking Y grew by forming relationships—with landowners, conservation partners, and the land itself—learning pasture by pasture what each place could support. From the start, grazing was never just about raising cattle. It was also about caring for soil, protecting water, and making room for wildlife within working landscapes.

The ranch remains family-owned and operated, with much of the work done side-by-side: moving cattle through pastures, repairing fences, managing weeds, planting native species, and tending to animals. It's physical, seasonal work shaped by weather patterns, plant growth, and close attention to how the land responds over time.

What began in 2015 with cattle grazing, a single backyard pasture has expanded across four counties in Western Washington. Today, Tracking Y rotates herds on mostly private lands, much of it protected by conservation easements—places intentionally set aside to remain open, productive, and connected to the landscapes around them.



Above: The Yancey Family, Tracking Y Ranch

Right: Jake opens his tilting fence to create a wildlife passage for elk, deer, and bear between grazing periods.





Grazing with Intention

For Tracking Y Ranch, grazing is a way of caring for land. Their approach—prescribed conservation grazing—starts with the simple understanding that no two properties are the same. Each grazing plan is shaped by soil, seasonal moisture, landowner goals, and careful observation of how the land responds over time.

Cattle are moved to avoid saturated ground and sensitive areas, especially during the wet season. This timing protects soil structure, limits erosion, and keeps nutrients on the land rather than sending them downstream.

When vegetation continues to grow and the ground remains covered, rain has time to soak in. Water slows, soil holds, and less mud reaches nearby creeks and rivers.

Over time, this kind of grazing does more than produce food. It can help manage invasive species, reduce wildfire risk, and support wildlife habitat—including species like the Oregon spotted frog that rely on open, wet meadows.

Working Lands That Give Back

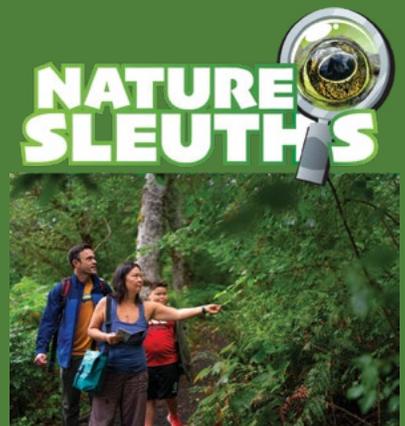
For Tracking Y, ranching means giving back to the land. Grazing is guided by a regenerative approach—using livestock to build soil that holds more water, supports plant growth, and strengthens the land through heavy rain and a changing climate. That same care allows working lands to do many things at once: produce food, support wildlife, protect water, and sustain rural livelihoods.

Care for the land is matched by care for the animals, grounded in respect and an understanding of where food comes from. Having seen hundreds of acres they once grazed give way to development, Tracking Y Ranch takes a long view of stewardship. Even without owning the land, the goal is the same—leave it healthier for whatever comes next.

Spring Called. It Wants You Outside (with Nature Sleuths).

This spring, some of the best adventures are close to home! Nature Sleuths is a simple way to explore local parks with a little purpose—part scavenger hunt, part nature walk, and made for all ages. It's an easy excuse to slow down, look around, and notice the plants, wildlife, and water that make Thurston County feel alive this time of year. Muddy shoes are welcome (and expected).

There's lots that's new this year! We've added two new Nature Sleuths missions at Grass Lake Preserve and the Gate-Belmore Trail. Our new interactive park map also makes it easier than ever to find missions near you. Jump into Nature Sleuths 2026 using the free Goosechase app with the game code **ZUJDRY**. Learn more and find all the missions at streamteam.info/nature-sleuths.



One pasture alone won't change everything.
But across a landscape, small, thoughtful choices add up to
healthier soil, cleaner water, and a more resilient future.

A Watershed Approach to Managing Beavers

Managing watersheds and living alongside beavers requires an understanding of beaver ecology, as well as how landscapes, infrastructure, natural resource industries, and long-term water storage systems interact. As climate pressures increase and freshwater systems become more fragmented, beavers are (re)emerging as key players in restoring natural water systems.

Activities once seen as nuisances—such as dam building and flooding—are now recognized as nature-based solutions. Beaver activity can reconnect floodplains, restore wetlands, and strengthen overall watershed resilience.

Interactions with Urban & Agricultural Infrastructure

In the Puget Sound lowlands and other developed areas west of the Cascades, beaver activity often overlaps with human infrastructure. Roads, culverts, stormwater systems, and neighborhoods are frequently located on historic floodplains. When beavers return to these areas, they restore natural water movement by spreading water back onto floodplains. While this provides ecological benefits, it can also conflict with drainage needs in urban environments.

A watershed-based approach focuses on identifying vulnerable infrastructure, such as undersized culverts or flood-prone roads, and prioritizing coexistence tools. These tools may include flow devices, culvert protectors, or relocating beavers to areas where conflicts are less likely.

Agricultural valleys are another key area of interaction. In Western Washington's fertile lowland floodplains, beaver dams can flood cropland or pasture, particularly where wetlands once absorbed seasonal flows. At the same time, these dams reduce erosion, slow peak flows, and increase water availability later in the season. Working with farmers at the watershed scale allows for targeted solutions—protecting high-value fields while encouraging beaver activity in riparian areas or lower-impact parcels where the benefits outweigh the risks.



Landscape Characterization & Beaver Habitat Dynamics

Watersheds west of the Cascades are shaped by steep headwaters, rainfall-driven streams, and densely vegetated lowlands. In these systems, whether a stream can support beavers depends on several factors, including stream slope, the type of plants along the banks, and past land-use practices.

Many headwater and mid-basin streams once supported broad wetlands and beaver meadow systems. Over time, channel straightening, road construction, and timber harvest altered stream shape and reduced habitat complexity. Looking at these systems at the watershed scale helps identify where valley floors are wide enough for pond building, where riparian forests provide food and building materials, and where natural hydrology could be restored through beaver activity.

Watershed-scale mapping also helps planners understand where beaver populations are most likely to thrive. Beaver colonies depend on available food, dam-building materials, and suitable stream conditions. Areas with healthy stands of willow, cottonwood, red alder, and Douglas-fir understory often support stable colonies. In contrast, urbanized areas or simplified stream channels in managed timberlands may only support temporary or limited beaver activity. Understanding carrying capacity helps ensure that management actions—such as relocation, coexistence planning, or flow-control structures—are placed where they are most likely to succeed long term.



Timberlands & Upper Watershed Management

In managed forestlands, beaver activity often intersects with road networks, culverts, and young regenerating forests. While historical timber harvest reduced stream complexity, beavers can speed recovery by raising water tables, slowing streamflow, and creating off-channel habitat that supports salmon and other aquatic species.



A watershed perspective helps identify where beaver-created wetlands can improve sediment retention and reduce downstream turbidity. These benefits support broader goals related to water quality, water storage and aquifer recharge, and aquatic habitat restoration.

Aquifer Recharge, Wetlands, & Hydrologic Reconnection

West of the Cascades, shallow aquifers rely heavily on seasonal recharge. Beavers play a unique role in this process. Their dams slow surface water, spread it across floodplains, and increase infiltration, helping recharge groundwater that supports summer baseflows.

This function is especially important in areas where groundwater-dependent

ecosystems support endangered species or contribute to municipal water supplies. As a result, wetland preservation and restoration efforts increasingly recognize beavers as ecological partners.

Many valley bottoms once supported extensive wetlands that were drained for agriculture or altered for transportation and timber access. Allowing beaver populations to expand—or supporting reintroduction where appropriate—helps restore these wetlands by rehydrating soils and recreating complex networks of ponds and channels. These reconnected floodplains improve water quality, filter sediment, buffer climate extremes, and support diverse wildlife, from amphibians to migratory birds.

Looking Ahead

A watershed-scale approach to beaver management in Western Washington balances ecological opportunity with human needs. Understanding landscape characteristics, assessing carrying capacity, and recognizing how beavers interact with urban areas, agriculture, timberlands, and groundwater systems can help communities understand where beavers fit on the landscape. This perspective helps change our view of beavers from obstacles to

essential partners
in building resilient,
healthy watersheds.





Orcinus Orca

In naming things...

Really, killer whales are not whales at all. In biology, animals are grouped by shared traits into categories such as orders and families. Orcas belong to the order *Cetaceans* which includes whales, dolphins, and porpoises. Within that group, they fall into the suborder *Odontoceti*, or toothed whales (as opposed to *Mysticeti*, the baleen whales). Despite their misleading name, killer whales are the largest member of the dolphin family.

Where the Name “Killer Whale” Comes From

The name killer whale often raises eyebrows, but its origins may surprise you. The word **orca** comes from ancient Greek and loosely translates to “demon from hell.” In the 18th century, naturalist Carl Linnaeus classified the species as *Delphinus orca*, sometimes translated as “demon dolphin.” Early sailors, after watching these animals hunt larger whales, referred to them as *Orcinus assasinus*—“whale killers”—a phrase that eventually became killer whale. Today, orca is more commonly used, reflecting a shift toward language that emphasizes the animal itself rather than the myths and fears that once surrounded it.

Built for Intelligence & Social Life

There are no predators hunting orca whales. They are at the top of the food chain, the ultimate apex predator, despite resembling pandas of the sea! Orcas are sometimes compared to wolves because of their complex social structure and coordinated group hunting strategies. Though they are powerful predators, orcas in the wild rarely pose threats to humans.

The surest way to identify killer whales is by the shape of their dorsal fin (that sticks up out of the water) and the white markings at its base, known as the saddle patch. Saddle patch markings are like a fingerprint, unique to each individual orca. Southern Resident orcas have a slightly forward-leaning and extra-rounded dorsal fin with an impressive variety of saddle patch markings. They are also known to be a bit smaller overall than other Resident populations.

At birth, an orca's brain is already 3 times the size of a mature human brain. Once killer whales become fully mature adults, their brains are 5 times the size of a human brain, weighing up to 15 pounds! Killer whales are known to be incredibly intelligent, using echolocation, or sonar, to hunt and navigate. They do this by producing a series of clicks that move through water, which run into objects they encounter and then bounce back as echoes. Orcas translate different echoes to discover the object's size, location, and type. Beyond echolocation, killer whales are known to hold greeting ceremonies, communicate in many distinct dialects, coordinate when hunting, learn quickly, and show a remarkable capacity for grief. Symbolically, killer whales represent family, community, protection, and the ocean's wisdom, and they possess the natural ability to inspire humans around the world with awe and wonder.

Not All Orcas Are the Same

At least 10 kinds of killer whales exist on Earth—inhabiting the waters of every ocean. Each unique group is called an “ecotype”, and has a distinct set of characteristics, behaviors, language, and diet.

The North Pacific is home to three main killer whale ecotypes—Offshore, Transient (aka Bigg's), and Resident. Among the Resident killer whales is a unique group called the Southern Residents—the only endangered orcas found in the US. In this series, we are going to focus on this local “ecotype”.



Killer whales typically live to about 50 years old; however, there are records of some females living to 80-100 years!

The Southern Residents of the Salish Sea

There are three Southern Resident “pods”, or family groups, that make up the Southern Resident clan—known affectionately as J, K, and L. Each pod remains together – traveling, playing, communicating, and hunting in multi-generational matriarchal family groups, with both male and female offspring bound to the mother for the entirety of their lives. This is the only example we know of where this occurs in nature.

The Southern Residents spend their lives seasonally from the coast of Northern California to Southeast Alaska, spending summer and fall months in the Salish Sea and off the coast of Southwest British Columbia. In the spring and winter, they travel south to California searching for food in warmer waters. The Southern Resident has very fine taste, subsisting exclusively on fish, with Chinook salmon making up 80% of their diet. The remaining 20% is a mix of coho, sockeye, chum, and steelhead. For this reason, among others, recovery efforts for Chinook salmon and Southern Residents in the Salish Sea are closely intertwined.

This is not the case for other killer whale groups, who regularly hunt marine mammals like seals and sea lions and often enjoy feasting on squid as well.

Killer whales are among the ocean’s most mysterious mammals, with many aspects of their lives still unknown. We will continue to dive deeper into the fascinating world of *Ornicus orca* over the next several Stream Team newsletter publications.

For actions to protect orcas and Salish Sea waters from stormwater pollution, including choosing safe household and yard care products, visit streamteam.info.

Meet the Southern Residents by visiting bit.ly/meetresidents.

To hear live orca sounds from your computer—connecting to an actual live underwater microphone, visit orcasound.net.

Volunteers: The Water Beneath Our Fins!

Stream Team volunteers are oxygenated water breathing life into our organization and propelling our mission forward. A mighty team of 226 people donated an impressive 1,800 hours last year. Stream Team staff extended heartfelt thanks at our annual Volunteer Appreciation Party on January 10.

We honored volunteers for:

- Collecting stream bugs and counting amphibian egg masses that provide valuable information on water quality.
- Restoring wetland habitats, planting trees, and removing invasive weeds.
- Educating people about local salmon and marine creatures that depend on clean water.
- Engaging community members at outreach events.

Interested in volunteering?

See our opportunities at [StreamTeam.info!](http://StreamTeam.info)



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Joseph Burton

Fins up for Joseph Burton! He is Stream Team's 2025 Volunteer of the Year. He showed outstanding commitment and passion by joining 31 volunteer events.

He volunteered with Second Saturdays at Sapp Road Park, McLane Creek Trail Maintenance, and as an awesome Salmon Steward. Joseph often went the extra mile, working double shifts as a Salmon Steward at McLane Creek. He was rewarded by greeting the first salmon returning home.

Joseph also participated in 14 restoration events that benefited local habitats. Sometimes, Joseph moved from one volunteer task to another, giving full days to Stream Team service.

What motivates Joseph to be so stellar? He says, "I'm motivated by the experiences of seeing the wildlife return to restoration sites after months of hard work with other volunteers, and the spark of connection that happens when I help someone transform their curiosity about our local streams into a shared story that they can become excited about."

Stream Team thanks Joseph for his enthusiasm and dedication. He made a lasting impact on our organization in 2025.

Build Your Own Beaver!

Beavers are some of nature's best builders! They help take care of streams by slowing down water, creating wetlands, and making homes for other animals. Stream Team works to protect local streams and waterways too—and you can help by learning about beavers and taking care of the environment.

In this activity, you can make your very own beaver using recycled materials and things you might already have at home—just like a real beaver uses what's around them!

What You'll Need— use what you have!

- **Cardboard** (cereal boxes, shipping boxes, egg cartons)
- **Paper towel or toilet paper rolls** (optional)
- **Scrap paper, newspaper, or old magazines**
- **Glue or tape**
- **Crayons, markers, or colored pencils**
- **Scissors**
- **Optional nature add-ins: small sticks, leaves, bark, pebbles**



1 BODY

Cut a large oval from cardboard for the beaver's body. Add a smaller circle or oval for the head.

2 TAIL

Cut a wide paddle shape from cardboard. Beaver tails are flat and strong!

3 FACE

Draw eyes, a nose, and big beaver teeth—or cut them out from scrap paper.

4 DECORATE

Color your beaver or turn it into a collage using magazine scraps, newspaper, or brown paper bags.

5 HABITAT

Glue on sticks or leaves to represent a dam, stream, or wetland.

Let's Talk About It!

After you finish your beaver, talk about these questions with a grown-up:

- What recycled or reused materials did you use to make your beaver?
- Why do you think beavers are important for streams and wetlands?
- If your beaver built a dam, where would it go? What would it help?

We'd love to see your beaver creations!

Send photos of your finished artwork to hello@streamteam.info, and your art may even get a special shoutout on our social media.



Events

Interested in becoming involved with Stream Team? We offer regular opportunities for people looking to volunteer, to participate in activities, or to learn online! This spring and summer there's a lot to look forward to, including:

- **Habitat at Home workshops—Year round, check schedule for a workshop near you.**
- **Restoration Work Parties at Sapp Road Park—Second Saturday of every month, 10 am–2 pm.**
- **Marine Creature Mondays at Boston Harbor Marina—Mondays, July 27–August 17, 11:30 am–2 pm.**
- **What's Blooming in Budd at Olympia's Port Plaza—Thursdays, dates in summer TBD.**
- **Salmon Stewards Training—Online year round. Field trainings will be held Aug–Nov. Dates TBD.**
- **Community Events and More!**

Scan for complete event info & registration!



Go to StreamTeam.info to learn more and register.



The calendar is updated regularly. Keep your eye on your email to see when new opportunities are posted.

Join our mailing list by visiting streamteam.info/newsletter-sign-up.

ON THE COVER: Fern in a Mossy Streambed

Stream Team Mission

To protect and enhance the water resources and associated habitats and wildlife in Thurston County through community action and education.

Special Needs

Participants requiring special accommodations can contact one of the coordinators listed at least one week prior to an event to make special arrangements.

Follow Us

- Thurston Stream Team
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Newsletter Contributors

Genevieve Becker, Alison Brown, Grant Gilmore, Cynthia Taylor, Kelsey Crane, Cameron Coronado, Lara Tukarski, Arlo Dolven, Kathryn Coffman, and Michele Burton Photographer.

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Stream Team Inquiries

hello@streamteam.info

IN LACEY:

Attn: Alison Brown
Tel: 360-742-6830
ali.brown@cityoflacey.org

IN OLYMPIA:

Attn: Genevieve Becker
Tel: 360-972-6284
gbecker@ci.olympia.wa.us

IN THURSTON COUNTY:

Attn: Cynthia Taylor
Tel: 360-754-4013
cynthia.taylor@co.thurston.wa.us

IN TUMWATER:

Attn: Grant Gilmore
Tel: 360-754-4140
ggilmore@ci.tumwater.wa.us



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3000 Pacific Ave SE
Olympia, WA 98501
streamteam.info

Can Good Urbanism Promote Healthy Streams?

Study after study has shown that salmon in urban streams are struggling to survive. The question remains: **why is this happening, and what can we do about it?**

In 2021, scientists made a breakthrough discovery about what was killing salmon in urban streams. The culprit, 6PPD-Q, is a toxic chemical in car tires. Even in small amounts, it can be linked to killing coho salmon at remarkable rates before they are able to reproduce. Cities and universities have been busy searching for solutions. Chemical alternatives for tires are being studied. Certain plants, fungi, and bacteria have shown they can actually remove harmful pollutants from the soil or water. But what if our urban landscape could help solve the problem?

What's the Deal with 6PPD-Q

6PPD is a chemical preservative in car tires. Exposure to ozone in the air, also known as oxidation, transforms 6PPD to 6PPD-quinone, a toxic chemical. As tires wear down, particles shed onto the road and wash into nearby streams during rain events. 6PPD-Q is shown to be fatal to urban coho at such high rates that simply reducing the number of cars on the road won't solve the problem. We actually have to consider the amount of road. But how do we do that? Ironically, urban development might be the best solution to urban pollution. Why? Because not all urbanization is created equal.

The Missing Middle

High- and medium-density walkable neighborhoods with access to frequent public transit reduce the need to



build large parking lots and multilane roads. However, medium-density neighborhoods, also known as middle housing, are so absent from North American cities they are referred to as the "missing middle." Instead, we tend to have high-density urban cores surrounded by miles of low-density single-family homes. This makes our cities geographically massive, requiring more roads, parking lots, and other impervious surfaces to get people from one place to another. Redesigning urban landscapes takes time and resources, but Intercity Transit is already taking steps in the right direction.

A Faster, Greener Bus System

On May 3, Intercity Transit will implement a comprehensive system redesign, modifying almost every bus route in Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater to adapt to regional changes in population and urban growth. All in all, the transformational system will expand

operation by 14% meaning more frequent buses and improved reliability for riders.

These measures take significant steps towards developing the region's first bus rapid transit line (a faster bus with its own lane) by implementing the new 9X route. These changes are designed to foster community health and reduce CO2 emissions from transportation in the county, but they will help stormwater too! By improving public transit, we can design our cities to connect people and places without requiring massive parking lots and road expansion. It is a form of urban design that allows our communities to continue to grow without sacrificing our lakes and rivers.

So next time you get out of the house, consider taking the bus. It's free!

Find maps of the new system on
intercitytransit.com