Annual Report

State Capacity Development Program Implementation

September 2021

Washington State Department of Health
Environmental Public Health
Office of Drinking Water

The Safe Drinking Water Act requires states to report on their Capacity Development Program implementation annually. Information in this report addresses the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's criteria for assessing state implementation of the Capacity Development Program.

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Purpose of this Report

Most people take safe drinking water for granted and are unaware of the difficulties communities face in providing it. There are many challenges in providing people with safe and reliable drinking water. We established a capacity development strategy that describes how we help systems acquire and maintain technical, managerial, and financial capabilities to ensure protection of public health.

We regulate public water systems under state law and a formal primacy agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This agreement delegates authority to the state to carry out the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA).

In 1974, the SDWA established national drinking water standards aimed at preventing waterborne illness. In 1996, SDWA amendments required each state to develop and carry out a capacity development strategy to:

1. Ensure all newly created systems meet technical, managerial, and financial capacity.
2. Establish a long-term strategy to assist existing systems in acquiring and maintaining technical, managerial, and financial capacity.
3. Ensure all water systems funded through the State Revolving Fund demonstrate technical, managerial, and financial capacity.

This report describes Washington State's capacity development strategy for new and existing drinking water systems using EPA's 2005 reporting criteria, highlights program improvements during the past year, and describes our progress and next steps.

From March until June 2020, field work was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, we developed COVID field safety guidelines and explored ways to conduct some survey elements remotely. When field work resumed, we used new approaches to maximize social distancing, including review of paperwork by phone and coordinating with the purveyor to utilize video for observation of water system conditions for some systems. Many LHJs, who conduct surveys of smaller systems on our behalf, were overwhelmed with COVID response activities and could not complete all their assigned surveys. Likewise, DOH staff were activated to the state COVID response, and some surveys were not completed. Lastly, many seasonal businesses did not open, resulting in deferral of their survey requirement. Overall, about 15 percent of surveys originally assigned for 2020 will roll over and be completed in 2021. Going forward, we will continue to utilize the new strategies adopted during the pandemic for increased efficiency in future years.

EPA Reporting Criteria

The following questions address the status of new and existing system capacity development strategies Washington developed, adopted, and implemented to ensure newly proposed water systems and existing water systems have the technical, financial, and managerial capacity to achieve and maintain compliance with federal regulations.

A. New Systems Program—Annual Reporting Criteria

1. *Has the state's legal authority (statutes and regulations) to implement the New Systems Program[1] changed in the previous reporting year?*

No.

2. *Have there been any modifications to the state's control points (its implementing authorities to review and verify a newly proposed water system has satisfied all three aspects of capacity before it may be approved)?*

No.

3. *List new systems in the state within the past three years and indicate whether those systems have, at any point during the first three years of operation, had unaddressed violations that incurred an Enforcement Targeting Tool (ETT) score of greater than or equal to 11 (EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance generates ETT scores quarterly).*

We now use EPA's ETT Tracker, which shows ETT trends over consecutive quarters. We appreciate the tool's ability to show trends and filter in various ways, including "by new system." We used the ETT Tracker to identify new systems and determine whether they appeared as priority systems on any previous ETT lists.

	Community Water Systems	Nontransient Noncommunity Water Systems	Transient Noncommunity Water Systems	Total
New in 2020	6	1	14	21
On ETT List with score ≥ 11	0	0	0	0

[1] *EPA's definition of a new system "includes both community or nontransient noncommunity (NTNC) water systems being newly constructed as well as systems that do not currently meet the definition of a public water system but that expand their infrastructure and thereby grow to become community water systems or NTNC systems."*

PWSID	Type	System Name	First Reported Date
WA53AD879	NC	Hinzerling H2A	23-Sep-20
WA53AD866	NC	Osprey Ranch FWH	23-Sep-20
WA5324042	C	Chico Heights Community Water Sys	23-Sep-20
WA53AD845	NC	Quincy Housing FWH	23-Sep-20
WA5311260	NC	Carpentar	23-Sep-20
WA5306581	C	Cascade View Estates #4	22-Dec-20
WA53AD854	NTNC	Old Dominion	22-Dec-20
WA53AD870	NC	Borton—Two Bluffs Camp	22-Dec-20
WA53AD864	NC	Omak OMK City Of	22-Dec-20
WA53AD852	NC	Olsen Road South FWH	25-Mar-20
WA53AD853	NC	Olsen Road North FWH	25-Mar-20
WA53AD781	NC	Martin Road Housing	25-Mar-20
WA53AC685	NC	Jackson Hwy Veterinary Clinic	25-Mar-20
WA53AD809	NC	Brightside Vintage Farm	25-Mar-20
WA53AD532	C	Koontz Ranch Water System	25-Mar-20
WA53AD822	NC	Brocious Water System	25-Mar-20
WA5331989	C	Fourth Of July Creek Estates	25-Mar-20
WA53AA482	C	Roosevelt Views Subdivision	25-Mar-20
WA53AD794	NC	Borton—Tieton Jones Camp	25-Mar-20
WA53AD808	NC	Skyline South FWH	25-Jun-20
WA53AC709	NC	Triangle Recreation Camp WS	25-Jun-20
WA53AD882	C	Beacon Hill East	25-Jun-20
WA5355476	NC	Polnell Landing Water Assoc.	25-Jun-20

4. What are we doing to correct, or what have we done to keep these numbers low?

We incorporated the Enforcement Response Policy and ETT into our compliance process. The ETT allows us to quality check our compliance process. When systems reach ETT priority status, we want them to return to compliance as soon as possible.

To ensure a comprehensive approach in bringing systems into compliance, we explore how to use ETT data through the Capacity Development, DWSRF, and Operator Certification Programs.

We also provide considerable training and outreach to struggling systems before resorting to formal compliance tools. We identify problems and help them find appropriate solutions. Often, systems have performance issues because of improper management. We start by examining their staffing, policies, rates, record keeping, and communication. This gives systems the opportunity to self-correct and thereby avoid formal enforcement action.

When systems are not able to get on track, we employ a compliance strategy that directs us to:

- Make protection of public health our top priority.
- Enforce requirements by holding system owners and operators accountable for compliance.

- Provide education to consumers and notify system owners of requirements, including the consequences of not meeting the requirements.
- Follow-through in a consistent, fair, and timely manner with compliance actions that are appropriate for the violation.

B. Existing System Strategy

1. *In referencing the state's approved existing system strategy, which programs, tools, and/or activities were used, and how did each assist existing federally regulated public water systems (PWS) in acquiring and maintaining technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) capacity?*

Our strategy for ensuring adequate water system capacity uses multiple approaches for the 4,148 federally regulated public water systems in Washington as of June 28, 2020. [2] It includes the following.

Annual Operating Permits

We provide a color-coded permit to each water system. The color indicates how well the system is meeting the requirements of its operating permit. It also is a way for us to share water system performance information with customers, lenders, local permitters, and other partners.

Prioritized Compliance Strategy

Our compliance strategy ensures that compliance efforts address the highest public health risks first. We notify water systems when they violate a regulation and inform them of actions to correct the violation and return to compliance. We provide training and outreach to help systems find appropriate solutions, which often include strengthening aspects of their managerial capacity. We use formal enforcement tools for systems that are unwilling or unable to work with us to return to compliance.

Comprehensive Planning

We require all public water systems to plan. We gear these plans to the appropriate level of system need, so that each system gets the most out of its planning process. We look at the utility's water system plan as the foundation, whereby the utility takes a comprehensive look at its needs and statutory requirements and charts a plan of action for meeting those needs and requirements. We use the planning documents as a means of ensuring water systems work to build capacity according to the expectations of the 1996 amendments to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Expanding community water systems and systems with 1,000 or more

[2] *In addition to the federally regulated water systems, Washington State regulates about 13,496 small water systems that do not meet the federal government's criteria for a public water system. We call these water systems Group B systems. Although they are not subject to federal regulations, they are subject to Washington State Board of Health rules.*

connections create a department-approved Water System Plan (WSP) and all other systems create a Small Water System Management Program (SWSMP).

Operator Certification

Our mission in the Office of Drinking Water (ODW) is to work with others to protect the health of the people of Washington State by ensuring safe and reliable drinking water. The Operator Certification and Training Program (OC&T) impacts our mission by coordinating, collaborating, and communicating with water systems, certified operators, governing bodies, and our training partners.

Our certified waterworks operators represent the foundation on which we build our state's economic, social, and environmental vitality. An aging infrastructure, increased water system demands, declining aquifers, workforce challenges, advancing technologies, and inadequate funding make the job of the certified operator more challenging and important than ever. OC&T leads our office to:

- Receive, process, and assist candidates with waterworks certification exam, operator-in-training upgrade, and reciprocity applications.
- Track, assist, and enforce annual certification renewal requirements and tri-annual continuing education requirements.
- Receive, process, assist, and provide practical exams for Backflow Assembly Tester candidates.
- Evaluate courses and training to ensure relevancy to the continuing education requirements.
- Coordinate certification exam testing with our third-party testing providers.
- Evaluate, provide, track, and enforce temporary certifications.
- Work with third-party trainers and organizations to provide ODW speakers for conferences and seminars and ensure a valuable and consistent message.
- Identify, assist, and enforce operator requirements for water system operator vacancies.
- Work with data management staff to ensure certified operator information remains relevant and easily accessible.
- Provide technical assistance on groundwater treatment, surface water treatment, water distribution, and cross-connection control.
- Receive, investigate, and prosecute complaints against operators.
- Work with our external partners through our Operator Certification Advisory Committee and Training and Technical Assistance Providers Group.
- Provide innovation in workforce development, succession planning, inter- and intra-agency coordination, rule and policy revision, and maintaining a national perspective.

Please see the Waterworks Operator Certification Program Annual Report to EPA for more information. Contact Bill Bernier, Operator Certification and Training Section Manager, at 360-236-3562 or william.bernier@doh.wa.gov if you have any questions.

Sanitary Surveys (Inspections)

State Department of Health (DOH) regional engineers and staff usually survey larger water systems and systems with treatment other than simple disinfection. Local health jurisdiction (LHJ) staff survey the state's numerous small public water systems. LHJ staff conduct more than half of the hundreds of (and sometimes more than 1,000) sanitary surveys performed each year. Without our local health partners, we could not successfully meet our responsibilities to complete effective sanitary surveys within mandated timeframes. During a sanitary survey, inspectors review the management and operations of the water system, identify areas for improvement, and identify resources to help them improve. When we find deficiencies, we explain how to correct them. Then, we set deadlines and follow-up to make sure systems address deficiencies.

Data Management and Communication

We track, store, and share public water system data with systems and the public at Drinking Water System Data. Our website provides customers with information about their water system, including water quality history, operating permit, and compliance status. Current advisories can be found by county and system name on our Drinking Water Active Alerts webpage. Our main ODW website, together with annual consumer confidence reports, keep customers informed about the overall performance of their water system.

Security and Emergency Response Program

We work with water systems and others to plan, prevent, and prepare to respond to security breaches and emergencies. We coordinate with our Agency Coordination Center (ACC), which is the central location for information gathering, analysis, and response coordination during an emergency. Our LHJs represent us at local EOCs during emergencies. Our mutual aid network, Washington Water/Wastewater Agency Resource Network (WAWARN), has at least 147 participating water systems and is coordinated by water systems within the network. They created a WAWARN website with information for members and nonmembers (wawarn.org).

Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF)

We provide construction loans and financing to make improvements for the protection of public health. In November 2020, we received 38 applications requesting about $108 million. Overall, we awarded $52 million to 21 applicants for new construction, consolidation, and preconstruction projects to improve water system infrastructure and protect public health. We continue to work toward system consolidations, and we grant up to 50 percent subsidies to construction projects that include consolidations.

To date, the consolidation grants have resulted in the elimination of at least 67 water systems now served and/or owned by another viable entity.

In 2020, DWSRF was able to offer $30,000 consolidation feasibility grants to 8 jurisdictions to allow them to study consolidation or restructuring alternatives.

DWSRF continues to promote asset management and awards bonus points on construction loan applications if the applicant has:

- Attended asset management training (1 point).
- Developed an asset inventory with expected life assigned (2 points).

Small Communities Initiative

This program is a collaborative effort among the departments of Health, Ecology, and Commerce. The Small Communities Initiative (SCI) DWSRF Set-Aside Contract Development Program works with small utilities across the state to help them plan for and finance their infrastructural needs. Over thirty water and wastewater systems directly benefitted from their efforts in the past year.

In addition to helping small communities with project management, SCI also participates in multiple inter-agency efforts to provide technical assistance and funding to water systems. Examples include:

- Planning and facilitating the Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council (IACC) conference, including sessions and technical teams. Twelve sessions were offered, approximately 230 people registered, and each session had between 20-128 participants.
- Convening and facilitating quarterly meetings of state and federal funding program staff, including Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, Ecology Water Quality funding, Public Works Board, Community Development Block Grant, USDA Rural Development, Washington State Department of Transportation, and the Transportation Improvement Board.

Rural Community Assistance Corporation

We use part of our local assistance set-aside in an agreement with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) to provide technical assistance to small communities across the state. RCAC assists systems with financial and managerial capacity building projects, such as rate studies, board training, and water system plan development. In 2020, RCAC continued to help public water systems improve their capacity to provide safe and reliable drinking water into the future, or to review the feasibility of consolidating water systems.

Training

We provide training to complement the work of our technical assistance providers. This includes one-on-one training for water systems, speaking at conferences and public meetings, offering regulatory insight at various venues, and facilitating comprehensive performance evaluations and performance-based training. In addition, our asset management work group identified several training needs for ensuring asset management programs in all our drinking water utilities. As a result, we created an asset-management training program appropriate to system

size and complexity. It includes such things as our assessment management spreadsheet tool for smaller systems.

5. *Based on the existing system strategy, how has the state continued to identify systems in need of capacity development assistance?*

We use compliance data, sanitary surveys, and planning documents to identify systems that need capacity development assistance. We continue to work with our regional offices to identify systems that need technical, managerial, and financial assistance through sanitary surveys, special purpose investigations, routine contact, and emergency response work. We target assistance to these systems through our technical assistance providers and regional office and headquarters staff. We are researching the ability of our available data management systems to track system capacity.

6. *During the reporting period, if the state has identified any PWS capacity concerns or capacity development needs (technical, managerial, or financial), what was the state's approach in offering and/or providing assistance?*

Local Assistance Set-Aside Funds

We use local assistance set-aside funds from our annual capitalization grant to help address the capacity development needs we identify. Over the past year, we provided:

- Sanitary surveys and related technical assistance to help fix problems identified during the survey.
- Training to third-party sanitary surveyors.
- Support during coliform and health advisory situations, including developing action plans with water systems and communicating with labs, local health jurisdictions (LHJs), and the media.
- Technical assistance to small water systems on water quality, source water protection, cross-connection control, and engineering issues.
- Source water protection technical assistance through conference training sessions and direct assistance from our source water protection program.
- A wellhead protection interactive GIS website.
- Managerial and financial capacity assistance through contracts with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation and Small Communities Initiative.
- Targeted financial technical assistance to improve small systems' financial capacity and position them to apply successfully for funding opportunities.
- Capacity information to water systems through our website, publications—including our Water Tap and H2Ops newsletters—and other media channels.
- More specific capacity development projects are described in detail in the *Report to the Governor—Water System Capacity 2017-2019* posted on our Capacity Development webpage.

7. *If the state performed a review of implementation of the existing system strategy during the previous year, discuss the review and how findings have been or may be addressed.*

The state has begun the review of the existing system strategy in 2020. We plan to finalize the review and modify the strategy on EPA's timeline for inclusion of asset management elements required by America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (AWIA).

8. *Did the state make any modifications to the existing system strategy?*

No.

Successes and Accomplishments

In the past year, we continued working toward our vision to help ensure *"The people of Washington State understand the value of safe drinking water and take action to protect and preserve it."* This section describes some program accomplishments from the past year and outlines the strategic planning efforts that shape much of our work as we move forward.

Asset Management

Asset management concepts provide important tools for helping small water systems understand their technical, managerial, and financial capacity needs. At its core, asset management is about identifying water system assets and planning for their proper operation, maintenance, and replacement. There are multiple areas where our work intersects with asset management concepts.

- Water system planning.
- Capacity development work.
- Supporting sustainable infrastructure through our DWSRF Program.

Water systems must be able to manage all aspects of operations to ensure their long-term sustainability. A system cannot be sustainable if it does not include ongoing operation, maintenance, and infrastructure repair and replacement costs in its rates.

To help small water systems prepare for the future, we have been working on coordinated approaches within our program and other state agencies to meet the asset management requirements in America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018. For example, we have developed, promoted, and distributed tools to support asset management activities for our small water systems.

We have incorporated asset management concepts into our planning guidance documents including the recently finalized *Water System Planning Guidebook* 331-068. In addition, a training program to teach small and medium systems how to incorporate asset management into their current operations and planning programs has been created.

Local Assistance Set-Aside Fund Project

In 2020, DOH continued to fund a project with the Washington State Department of Commerce to develop water utility resiliency in the Mid-Columbia Basin using local assistance set-aside funds. In that region, declining aquifers could affect at least 137 Group A community water systems. This project assisted the water systems in organizing and communicating their current efforts and future plans to maintain reliable water sources.

DOH continues to collaborate with multiple stakeholders to support a successful application from the Washington State University for a Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Applied Science Grant. The grant proposal was a collaborative effort of Office of the Columbia River (OCR), DOH, Commerce, Lincoln County, multiple conservation districts, and drinking water utilities. The proposed project will establish a long-term, stakeholder-driven groundwater monitoring network. The network will expand existing sampling and include a minimum of fifty groundwater wells. Data from this study will help utilities and agencies better understand how groundwater supplies have changed over time. It will also establish a baseline for future groundwater level tracking.

All these efforts provide managers in the region with much needed data to support decision-making. DOH is also working with water systems in the area to consolidate water systems to increase operational efficiency, reduce customer costs, and improve service.

Arsenic Treatment Optimization Program (ATOP)

Since its start in 2011, the Arsenic Treatment Optimization Program has helped water systems across Washington progress steadily towards increased compliance with the Arsenic Rule and optimized operation of treatment plants. Most of these water systems demonstrated their ability to produce reliable and consistently treated water that meets regulatory standards. However, water systems occasionally struggle to get their arsenic treatment processes to work effectively. We require water systems with arsenic treatment to monitor the treated water for arsenic at least monthly. This sampling frequency helps us identify treatment issues early, providing greater public health protection.

We began targeted technical assistance in 2012. Since then, the percentage of arsenic treatment facilities successfully meeting the arsenic MCL has steadily increased from 76 percent at the end of 2011, to 99 percent at the end of 2020 (based on the most recent sample collected at the end of the year). We continue to work with water systems with arsenic removal facilities installed as we closely monitor their treatment processes, provide technical assistance, and take compliance action in some cases.

There are thirteen other systems with treatment issues over the course of 2020. Ongoing engagement with water systems is needed to maintain and improve the level of public health protection they provide through reduced arsenic exposure. Due to the success of the ATOP Team, funding constraints, and other agency priorities, people on the ATOP Team have been asked to focus on other core safe drinking water activities.

Sanitary Survey Program

Sanitary surveys of public water systems are key to capacity development. Regular inspections of water systems provide opportunities for education and technical assistance for operators and other water system personnel.

The Sanitary Survey Program coordinates and administers inspections of all water systems in Washington. Inspections occur every three to five years, depending on system type, source, and performance. During an inspection, surveyors physically inspect the water system components, review the management and operations of the water system, and identify areas for improvement. When we find significant deficiencies, we explain how to correct them, and set deadlines and follow-up to make sure the system addresses the deficiencies. We also document our observations and recommendations associated with steps the water system can take for improved technical, managerial, and financial capacity.

Some survey findings warrant further follow up by other specialists in the regional offices. These are called "internal referrals." Examples of internal referrals include potential GWI (groundwater under the influence of surface water) and improper operation and monitoring of disinfection systems.

In 2020, we built on prior year enhancements to our data system that enable us to track the occurrence of significant deficiencies and other findings to measure trends that indicate success in building capacity to prevent future occurrences.

DOH regional engineers and other staff usually survey larger water systems and systems with treatment other than simple disinfection. Our LHJ partners survey the state's numerous smaller public water systems. LHJ staff conduct more than half of the hundreds of (and sometimes more than 1,000) sanitary surveys performed each year. Without our local health partners, we could not meet our responsibilities to complete effective sanitary surveys within required timeframes.

During 2020, ODW and local health staff surveyed 768 water systems, including 371 community systems, 330 transient noncommunity (TNC) systems, and 67 nontransient noncommunity (NTNC) systems. See Table 1 (next page) for more specific data.

Table 1: Sanitary Surveys Completed in 2020 by DOH or Third-Party Staff

2020 Sanitary Surveys				
Region and Surveyor type	**Community**	**NTNC**	**TNC**	**Total**
Eastern Regional Office DOH Surveyors	98	18	54	170
Eastern Regional Office Third Party Surveyors	22	17	123	162
Northwest Regional Office DOH Surveyors	82	4	13	99
Northwest Regional Office Third Party Surveyors	60	8	42	110
Southwest Regional Office DOH Surveyors	72	4	13	89
Southwest Regional Office Third Party Surveyors	37	16	85	138
Total	**371**	**67**	**330**	**768**

Source Water Protection Program

During the 2020 reporting period, we continued outreach to both state and local jurisdictions to improve awareness of source water protection and the existence and location of wellhead protection areas, and the importance of planning integration with local governments. Unfortunately, these efforts were hampered in 2020 due to several circumstances outside our control: a quarter-long absence of key SWP staff due to accident and ensuing medical care/recovery; COVID-related shutdowns causing cancellation of certain conferences and trainings at which we would have otherwise presented, together with workflow interruptions at the local permitting level; and, as the primary agency addressing Washington State's COVID response, DOH met emergency demands by temporarily reassigning staff, including key SWP staff, to COVID-related functions using separate funding.

We economized on staff availability and time by significantly limiting review and comment on environmental determinations made under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), typically related to construction projects within wellhead protection areas. At division level, discussions that we were participating in about creating a more robust and internally coordinated overall SEPA response were sidelined. We focused our efforts on these activities:

- Reviewing and commenting on updates to local-level plans and regulations adopted under the state Growth Management Act (GMA). We particularly honed in on critical areas ordinances, which include critical aquifer recharge areas (CARAs) that incorporate wellhead protection areas; providing up-front review and suggestions rather than merely commenting on draft work at the end of the process; and offering heightened technical assistance to very small jurisdictions that have limited or no planning expertise on staff.

- Consulting with state Department of Ecology staff in its update of state guidance on CARAs and providing in-depth review of the source water protection aspects of the draft guidance when released.
- Collaborating with Ecology staff to develop a CARAs training module as part of the state Department of Commerce's course in critical areas monitoring and adaptive management. This wasn't delivered until 2021, but much of the formative work occurred in 2020.
- Trained local planners and water system operators/managers on water system/GMA plan integration, promoted using the DOH source water protection GIS website as a central reference for identifying wellhead protection areas.
- Provided direct technical assistance to property owners, water systems, consultants, and other staff.
- Took part in a series of interagency stakeholder discussions convened by University of Washington to develop an update proposal for Washington's growth policy framework (encompassing GMA, SEPA, and other state-level regulations).

We strengthened partnerships with key state and federal agencies including Ecology (Clean Water Act lead agency), the state departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the U.S. Forest Service to raise awareness about the Source Water Protection Program, and the need for and importance of protecting drinking water from contamination and loss of supply. We collaborated on projects with mutual benefit to drinking water and fish through the Drinking Water Providers Partnership. We actively serve on the Washington well-drilling technical advisory committee. We are an active member of the Lower Yakima Groundwater Management Area. We continue to work closely with Ecology on underground injection control program guidance for storm water.

We also continue to provide technical assistance and small grants to utilities to develop and implement source water protection plans and activities. Grant projects include funding for watershed control, watershed characterization, source water protection planning, alternative analysis for existing or potential contaminants, evaluation and characterization of critical aquifer recharge areas, and evaluation of risk due to drought or declining aquifer.

For additional details see the annual source water protection program report.

Next Steps

As we continue to address Washington's small system challenges, we remain focused on our vision that "The people of Washington State understand the value of safe drinking water and take action to protect and preserve it."

Our approach is multi-faceted.

- We focus training and technical assistance resources as much as possible on water systems that are willing and able to build their capacity to sustain themselves.
- We rely on our graduated compliance approach to direct water systems when they are unable or unwilling to maintain sufficient capacity.
- We strive for innovative approaches, like consolidation and restructuring strategies, to help struggling small systems out of the water business and mitigate the impending financial burden on customers of those systems.
- We continue to nurture relationships and develop forward-thinking strategies with our partners to help meet our goal of providing safe and reliable drinking water to the people of Washington.

In 2020, we continued to support water systems to address technical, managerial, and financial capacity that support the provision of safe and reliable drinking water for everyone served by public water systems. In the early days of the COVID crisis, we developed more than a dozen documents to help water systems address special technical, managerial, and financial issues in these unprecedented times. Partly as a result of the pandemic, we built new relationships and rekindled old ones with state and federal partners to enhance our services to water systems. We are also more deliberate about a capacity development approach that includes all staff in the Office of Drinking Water, as well as other parts of state government, local health jurisdictions, and non-governmental organization to support and sustain the capacity of public water systems.