



# Discovery Clean Water Alliance

Update – June 2012

## Regional Clean Water Partnership Taking Shape

After evaluating a range of engineering and financial factors, officials representing Clark County, Clark Regional Wastewater District and the Cities of Battle Ground and Ridgefield have agreed to move forward with a regional wastewater partnership – the Discovery Clean Water Alliance (DCWA). As proposed, the shared asset model would enable partners to leverage existing resources, control future capital costs and protect customers from rate spikes.

The move also facilitates the expansion of wastewater treatment capacity, eliminating what has long been a barrier to attracting large employers to the region. This information sheet outlines how the DCWA will be structured, what improvements the region might expect and what comes next.



## A System Built Around Customer Priorities

The partners believe existing rate-payers are priority number one. To that end, we conducted dozens of meetings with elected officials representing affected constituencies and held listening sessions with a wide range of community organizations. To test and prioritize the ideas this outreach generated, partners conducted a statistically-valid survey of current customers. The survey revealed strong public support for an alliance that is practical, affordable, fair and forward-thinking. Officials built the resulting partnership agreement on **ten customer-defined core values** (see inset), which will serve as the basis for future management decisions.

## Benefits to Existing Customers

For most customers, there will be little noticeable change in service. Battle Ground and Clark Regional customers will continue to be served by their existing provider. There will be no change in billing or service. Efficiencies will be achieved by consolidating overlapping administrative duties under a single contracted manager. Pending additional evaluation, the City of Ridgefield may choose to merge wastewater collection service with the Clark Regional Wastewater District. This would effectively expand the combined service base, resulting in better rate stability and lower connection costs over time. The larger customer base also allows partners to negotiate better rates on loans used to finance system improvements. These savings are then passed along to customers. Rate and connection policies and costs will be determined by a Transition Board in coming months.

### Core Values

1. *Ensure reliable, predictable service*
2. *Manage resources responsibly, efficiently and equitably*
3. *Protect public health*
4. *Optimize use of existing facilities*
5. *Be financially transparent*
6. *Use new technologies to improve efficiencies and environmental health*
7. *Provide a fair, positive and secure work environment for utility employees*
8. *Ensure capacity to support regional land use and economic strategies*
9. *Invest in improvements that create system-wide benefits*
10. *Make business decisions collaboratively*

## Setting the Stage for Economic Opportunity

By connecting systems, partners can meet future service demand without paying for repetitive facilities in each jurisdiction by transferring flows between existing treatment plants with excess capacity, no matter where the facility is located. Beyond reducing costs, this expansion will make our area a more viable location for economic development by creating *on-demand* capacity. Our research identified dozens of properties that could serve as major employment centers, but are not currently utilized in that capacity due to a lack of sewer service. Our elected officials are committed to changing that by bringing opportunity sites on-line throughout the areas displayed in the regional system graphic below.

## Equitable Governance, Adaptable Structure

- **Shared-Ownership:** Partners have adopted a decentralized structure to ensure all partners have an equitable voice, and vote, in decision-making related to their interests. Management would be contracted out to the Clark Regional Wastewater District, with officials from all partner agencies responsible for decision-making.
- **Buy-In, Buy-Out Framework:** All partners are required to pay their fair-share to enter into the agreement, including prior and future capital investment costs. Partners opting to leave the regional entity would be required to reimburse other partners for any unpaid asset or service costs.
- **Fair and Transparent Operations.** Capital investment and management decisions will be structured to benefit the region equally, and serve the best interest of rate payers. Financial decision-making is guided by agreed-upon policies, and updates require public review and input.
- **System Flexibility.** The agreement can be modified to add new partners or other services in the future, assuming that expansion benefits rate-payers.



## Next Steps

While the partners have agreed to the Discovery Clean Water Alliance in principle, some of the detailed steps required for legal formation will be ongoing through summer 2012. In the meantime, partners will proceed with design and installation of a wastewater transmission system extension along the I-5 corridor to ensure infrastructure is in place to serve economic recovery as soon as possible.

As always, additional information will be produced in advance of key project milestones and decision-making points. To learn more, please contact one of the local sewer service providers listed below.

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