

## Keeping Pet Waste out of Beaver Lake



“Scoop it, bag it, and place it in the trash.” According to Dave Ward with Snohomish County, this is the best method pet owners can follow to ensure that animal wastes don’t degrade water quality in the Beaver Lake watershed. Ward and his colleagues in the Snohomish County Surface Water Management Division have launched a pilot program to figure out the most effective ways to persuade pet owners to clean up after their animals.

In addition to being unsightly, stinky, and hazardous to sneakers and bare feet, pet waste left on the ground to decompose can create water quality problems, as well as human health and safety risks. Pathogens, including fecal coliform bacteria such as *E. coli*, are present in nearly all pet wastes and will move in surface water runoff to streams and lakes, especially during heavy winter rainstorms.

Part of the intent of Snohomish County’s grant-funded pilot project is to figure out the best way to keep dog waste out of streams, rivers, and lakes. Although poop from any type of pet can be problematic, Snohomish County’s education and action campaign has focused on dogs. “Dogs leave the biggest piles, so to speak,” says Ward. He acknowledges that other animals also have a negative effect, “Particularly livestock.”

Much of what Snohomish County has learned is directly applicable to the Beaver Lake community here in King County. The following list includes a few facts, as well as some Dos and Don’ts based on Snohomish County’s experience:

- According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, more than 37% of homes in Washington have dogs, with an average of 1.5 dogs per dog-owning household. If the statewide averages hold true in the Beaver Lake Management District, there are roughly 416 dogs in the approximately 750 homes within the LMD.

- Snohomish County estimated an average of 0.33 lbs of solid waste per dog, per day. This means the canines of the BLMD could be producing more than 137 lbs daily across the watershed and more than 50,000 lbs annually!
- **DO:** Scoop it, Bag it, and Put it in the Trash! If you are connected to the municipal sewer, it is okay to put pet waste in the toilet and flush it. If you are connected to a sewer system – though Snohomish County has found many folks feel it is too much trouble and kind of gross.
- **DON’T:** flush pet wastes if your home has a septic system. Dog hair and ash from commercial dog food are often present in dog waste, and neither of these things digest well in septic systems. Further, the additional flushes of the toilet might overload the septic system.
- **DON’T:** compost it or bury it. Most composting systems don’t kill all the pathogens present in pet waste. According to Snohomish County’s research, even commercial composting processes don’t reach temperatures hot enough to kill pathogens. Soil temperatures in the Pacific Northwest are too cool to kill pathogens, so pet waste could still flow to the nearest lake or stream with shallow groundwater flow.

To view more posters like the one on this page, visit Snohomish County’s website: <http://petwaste.surfacewater.info>. 

*Thanks to Dave Ward and his colleagues at Snohomish County for the information in this article, and to the Department of Ecology for funding the project with a Centennial Clean Water Fund grant.*



# Dogs can't flush



More than 20 tons of dog waste is dropped in Snohomish County backyards every day.

**Scoop the poop, bag it,  
and place it in the trash.**

Clean yards. Clean streams. (And clean paws!)

**101 REASONS TO PICK UP PET WASTE:  
NUMBER 11**

  
Snohomish County  
Public Works  
Surface Water Management  
[www.petwaste.surfacewater.info](http://www.petwaste.surfacewater.info)

*See other side for tips for keeping pet waste out of Beaver Lake*