

Water quality in our region

Prepared for the King County Council's
Regional Water Quality Committee, February 2026

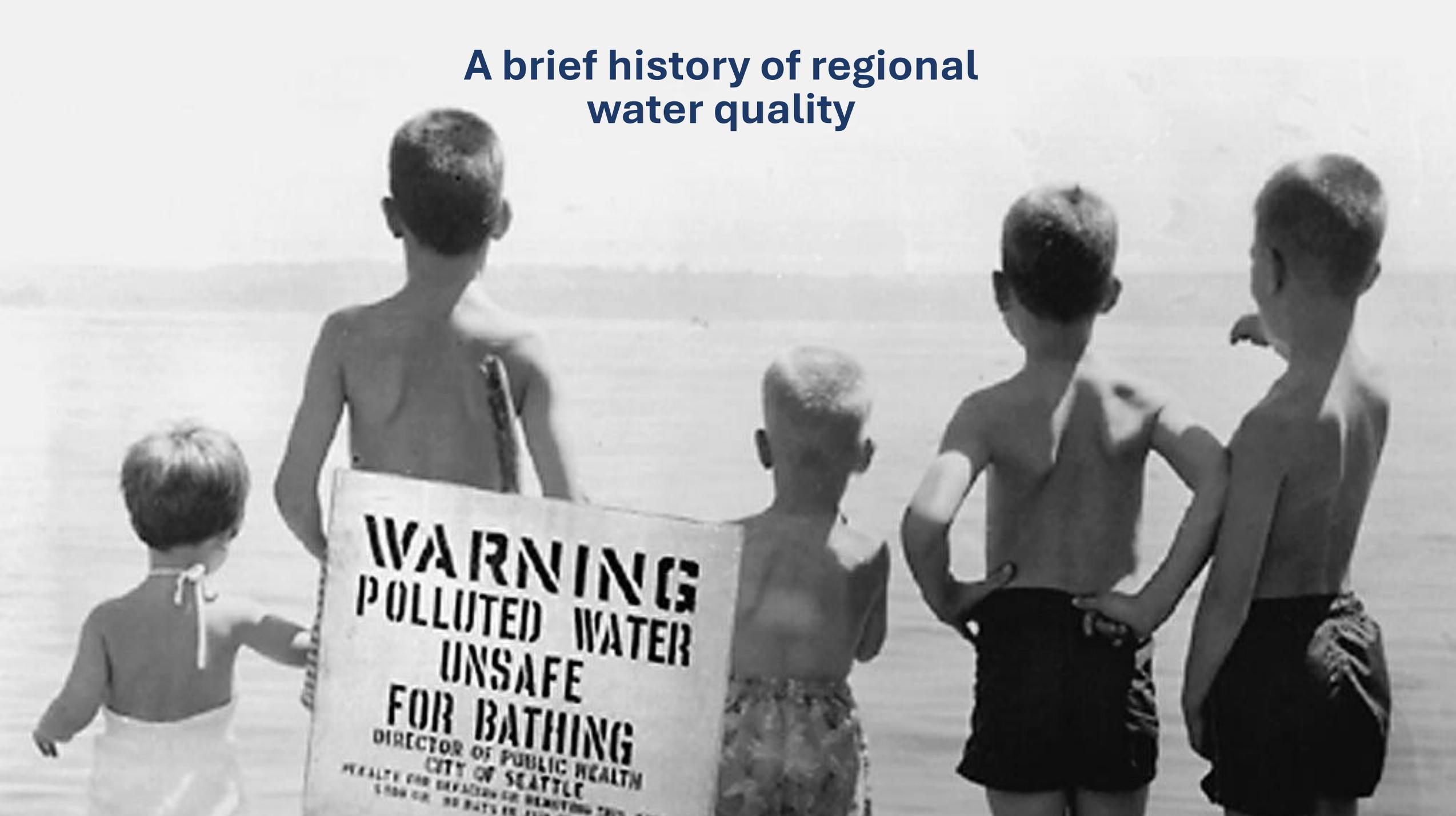


King County



Point Robinson, Vashon Island

A brief history of regional water quality



Timeline of key regional water quality actions

1958
METRO
created

1972
Clean Water
Act

1980's
Long-term
monitoring begins

1990's
WA Growth
management Act

1994
METRO merges
with King County

Mid-90's-2000's
CAO and
Stormwater Manual



Timeline of key regional water quality actions

1958
METRO
created

1972
Clean Water
Act

1980's
Long-term
monitoring begins

1990's
WA Growth
management Act

1994
METRO merges
with King County

Mid-90's-2000's
CAO and
Stormwater Manual



Timeline of key regional water quality actions

1958
METRO
created

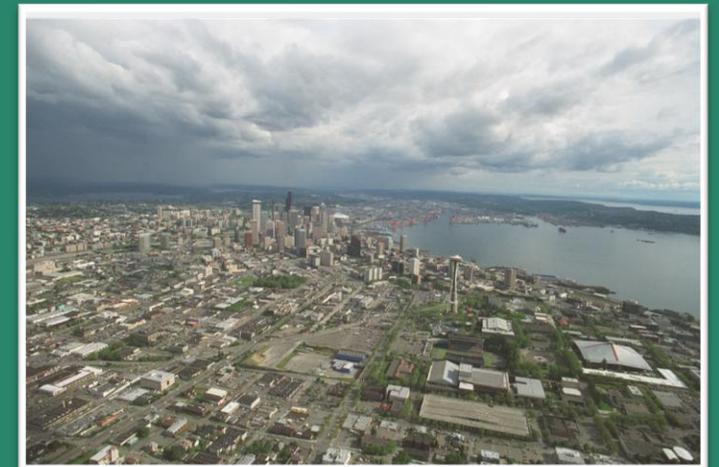
1972
Clean Water
Act

1980's
Long-term
monitoring begins

1990's
WA Growth
management Act

1994
METRO merges
with King County

Mid-90's-2000's
CAO and
Stormwater Manual



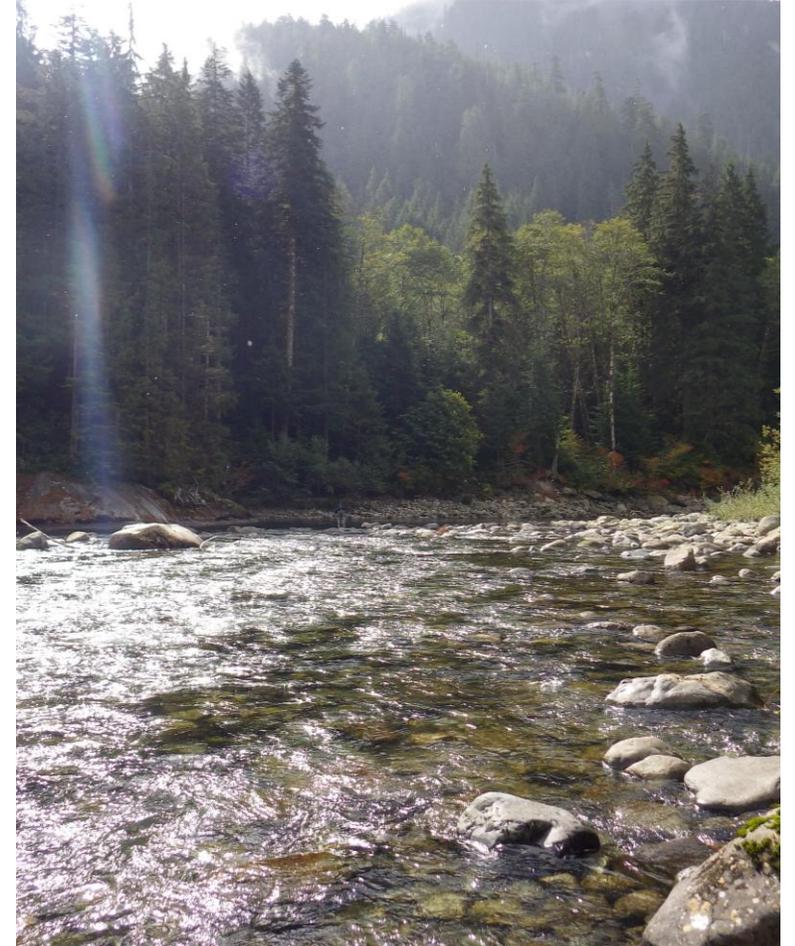
Results of those actions



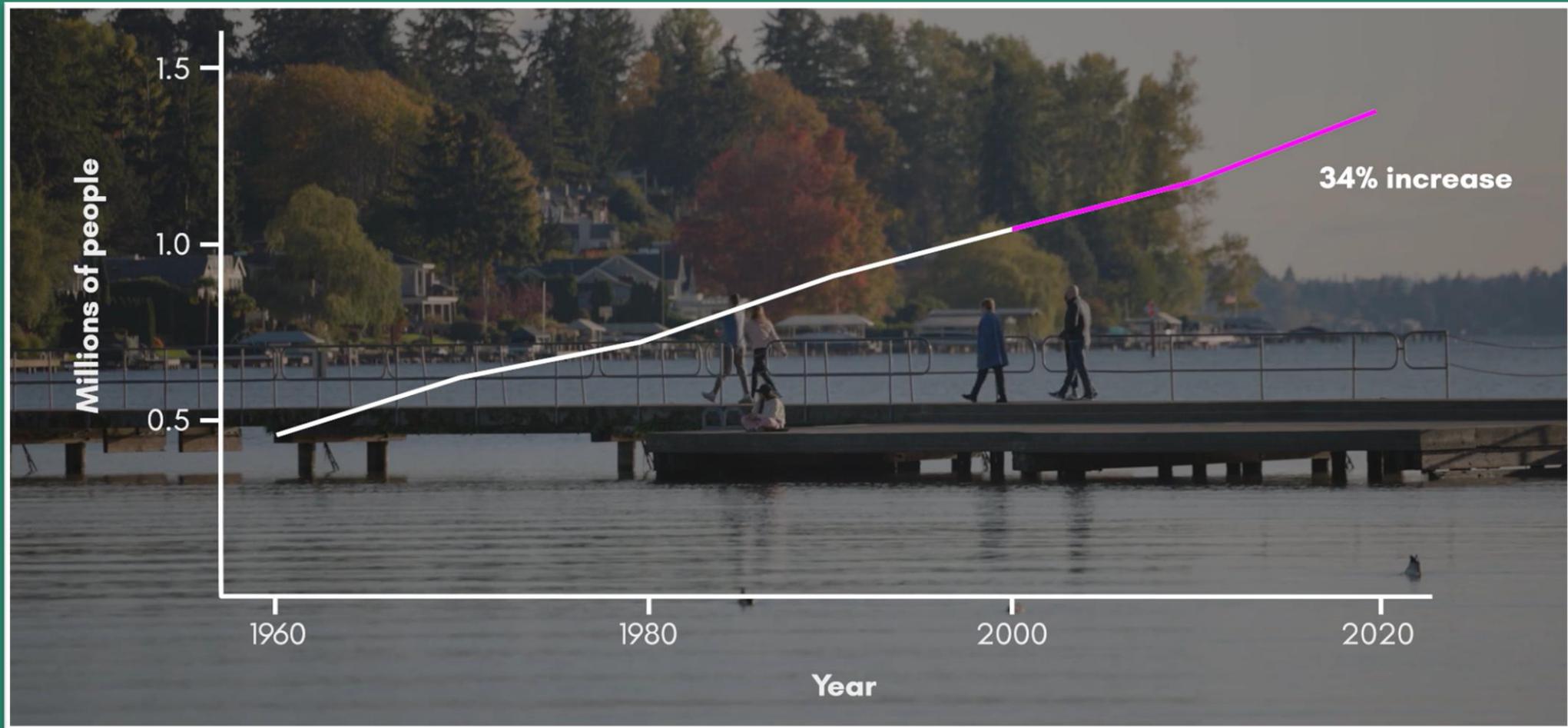
Decreasing fecal bacteria and nutrients are leading to better stream water quality over time



Aquatic insects also show us stream health is improving



Lake Washington nutrients are decreasing despite rapid population growth and development



Puget Sound meets water quality standards most places most of the time

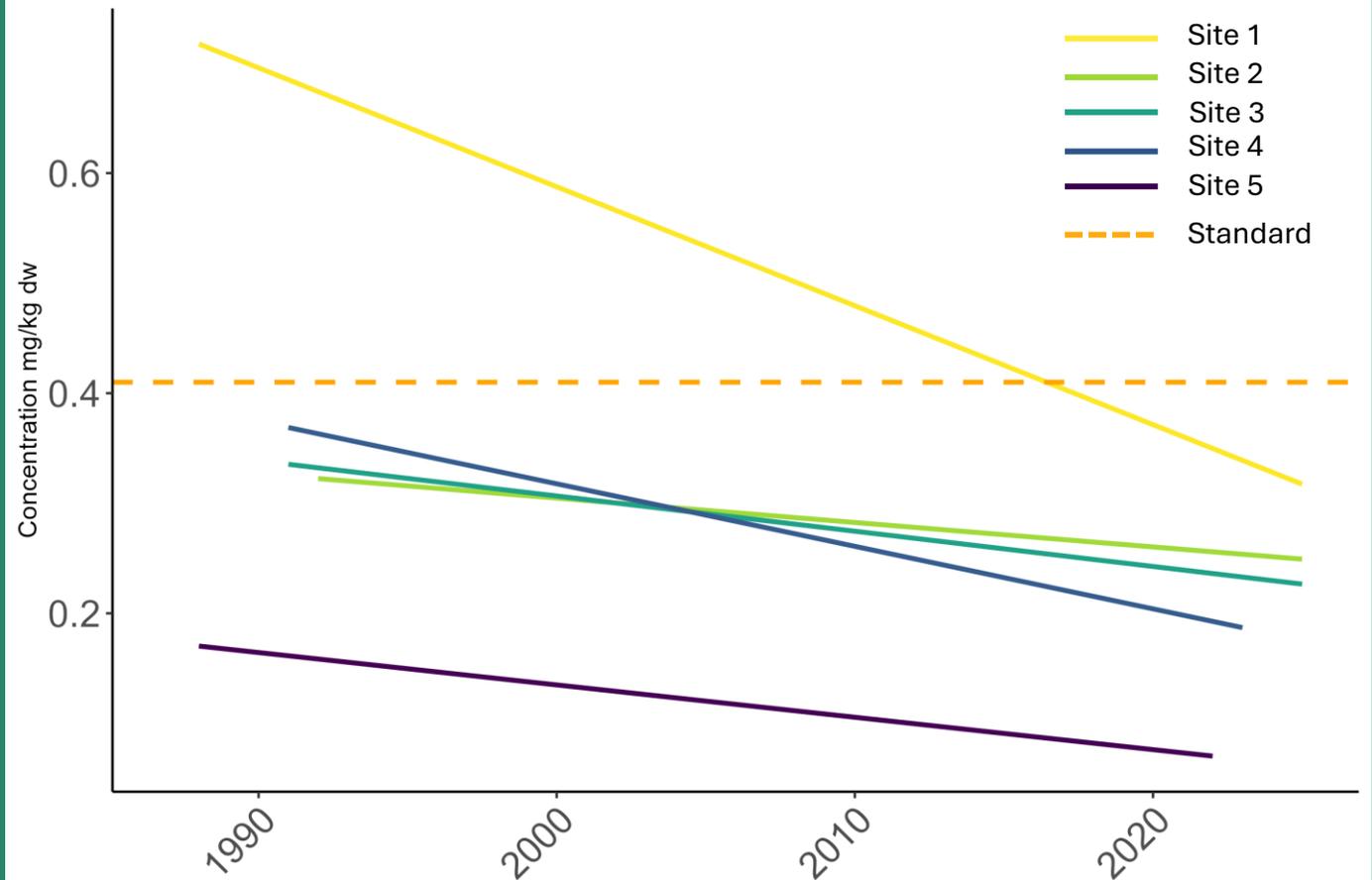


Buoy in Whidbey Basin

Sediments in Elliott Bay and Lake Washington show that PCBs and mercury have decreased



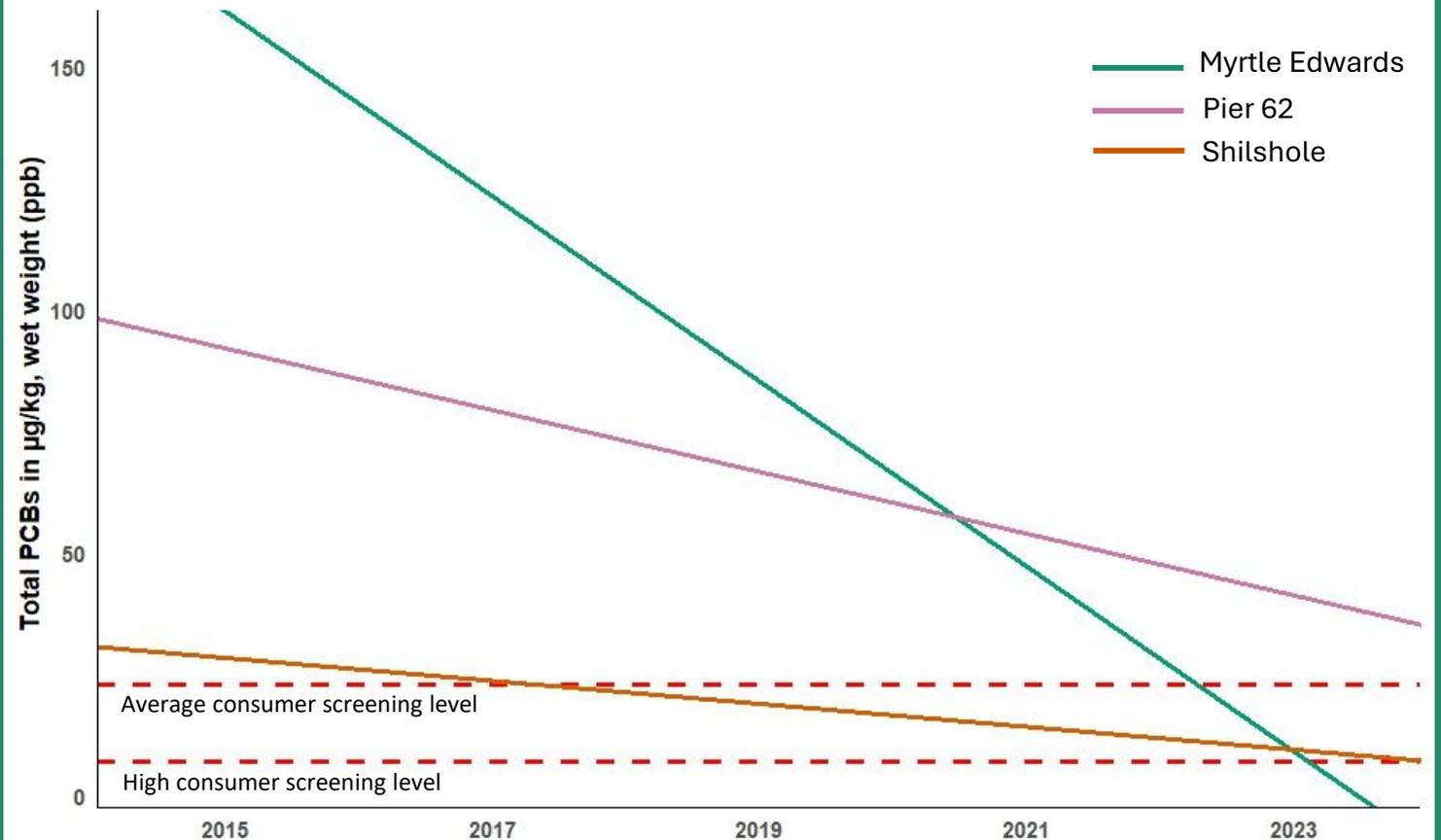
Mercury decreasing at five Elliot Bay monitoring locations



PCBs are decreasing in Elliott Bay English sole over the last 20 years



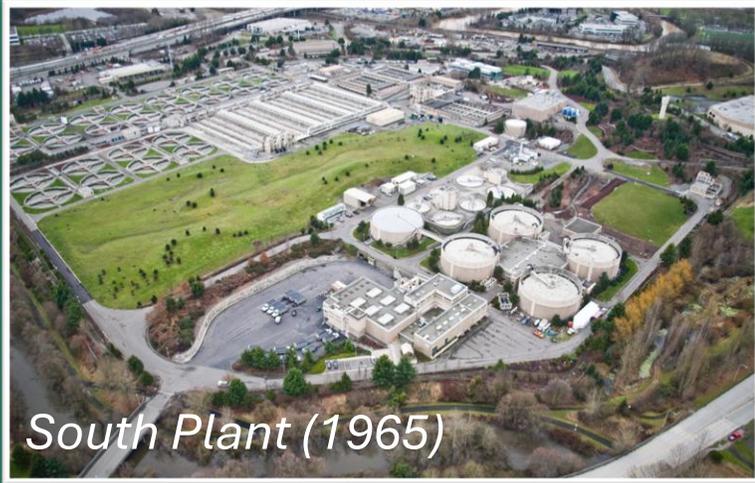
PCBs decreasing in fish at three Elliot Bay monitoring locations



Why are things getting better?



We're investing in wastewater treatment



We're better at controlling non-point sources



We're enacting legislation and policies to control sources



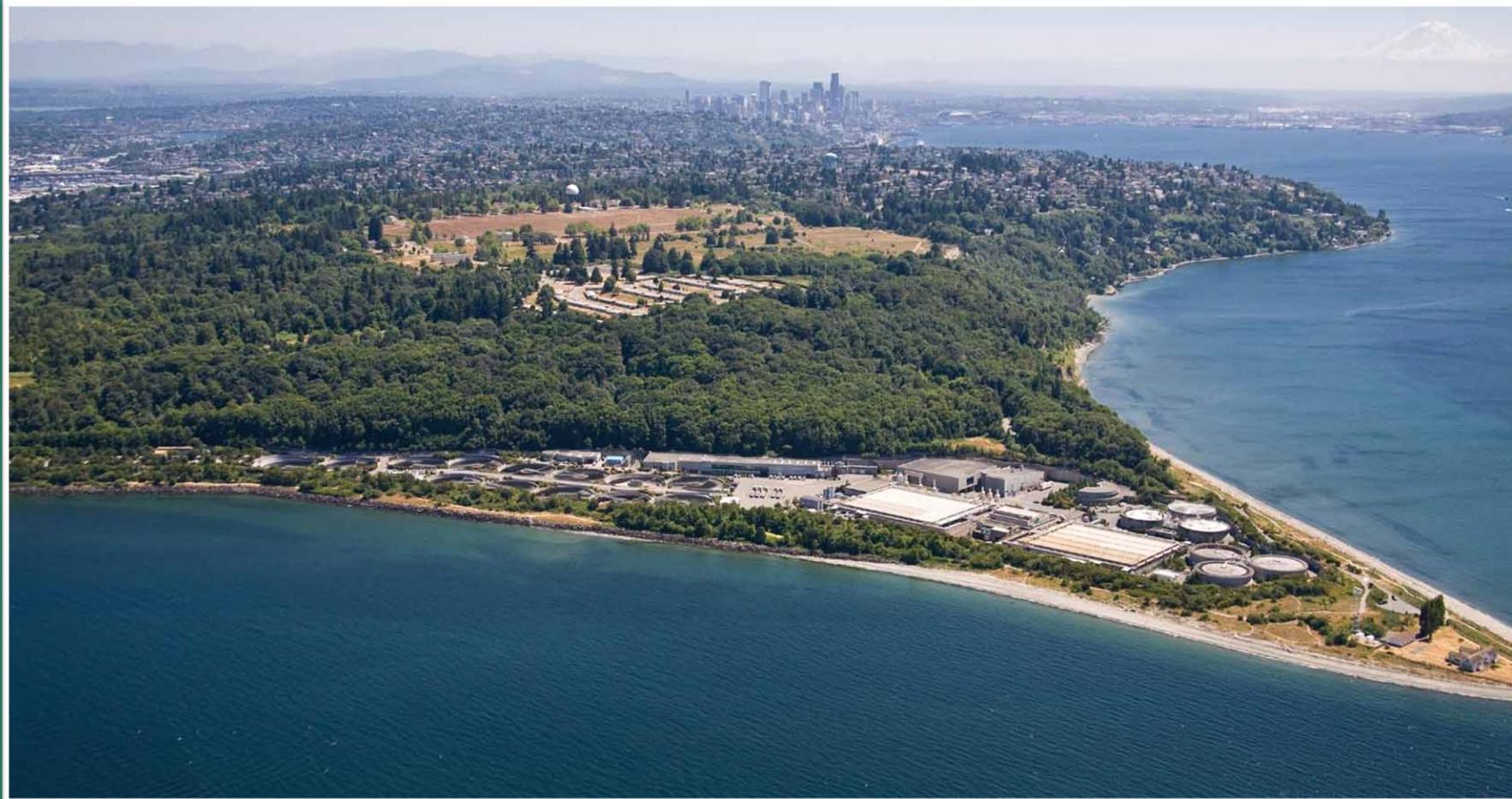
We're investing in protection and restoration



But there's more to the story.

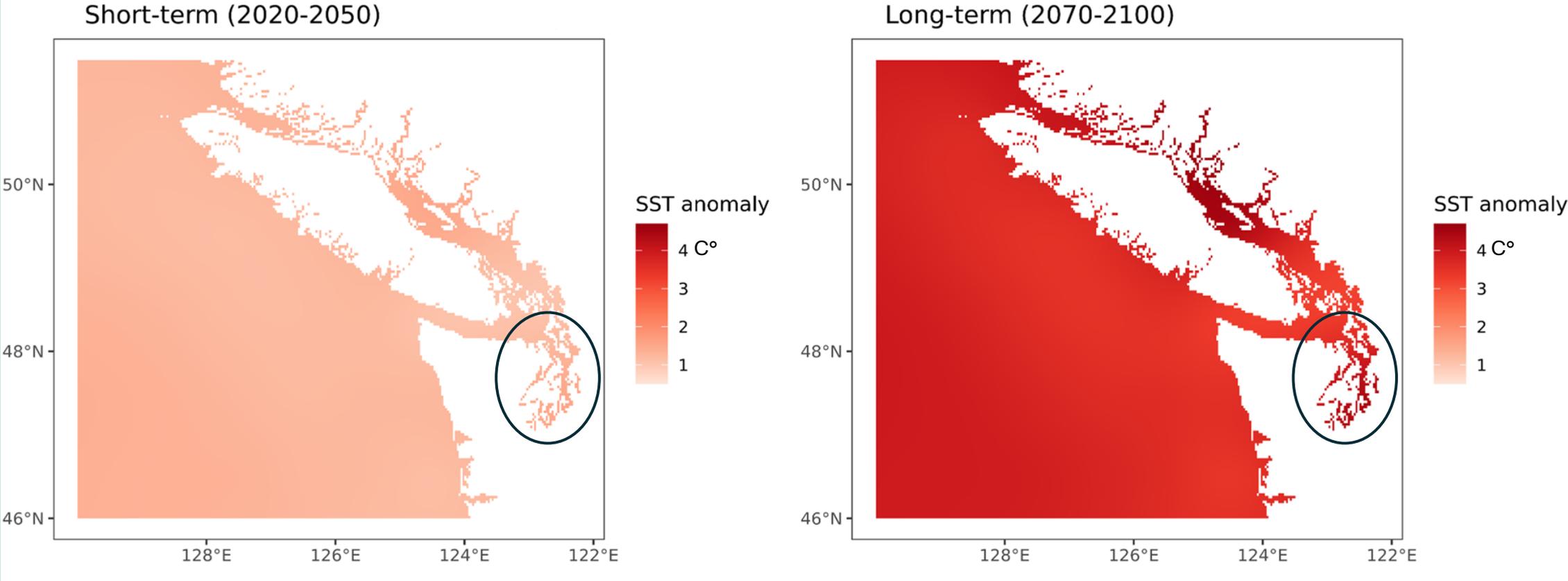


Wastewater didn't disappear and now the focus is on Puget Sound



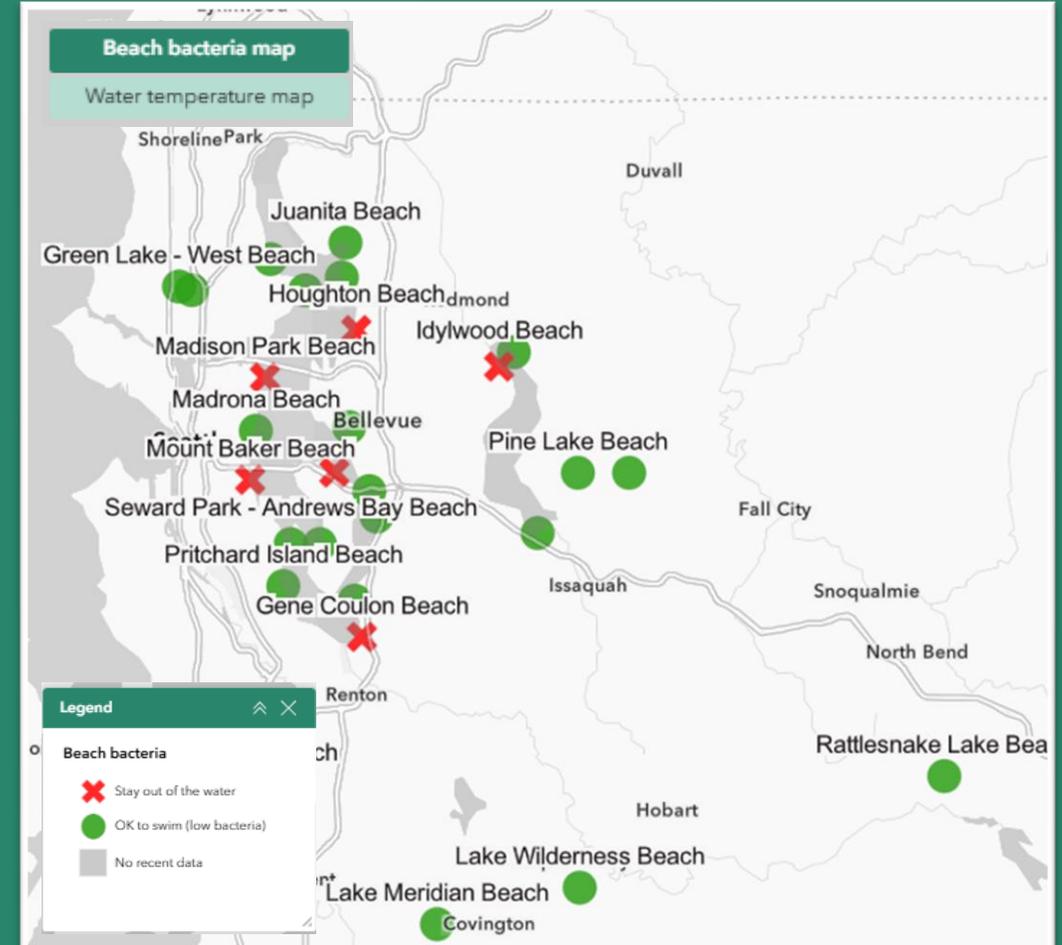
Climate change threatens our water quality

Projected warming of regional ocean temperatures



Source: Walker, Stevie, et al. "Future temperature and salinity in Puget Sound, Washington State, under CMIP6 climate change scenarios." *Journal of Water and Climate Change* 13.12 (2022): 4255-4272

Stormwater still carries chemicals, nutrients, and poop into our waterways



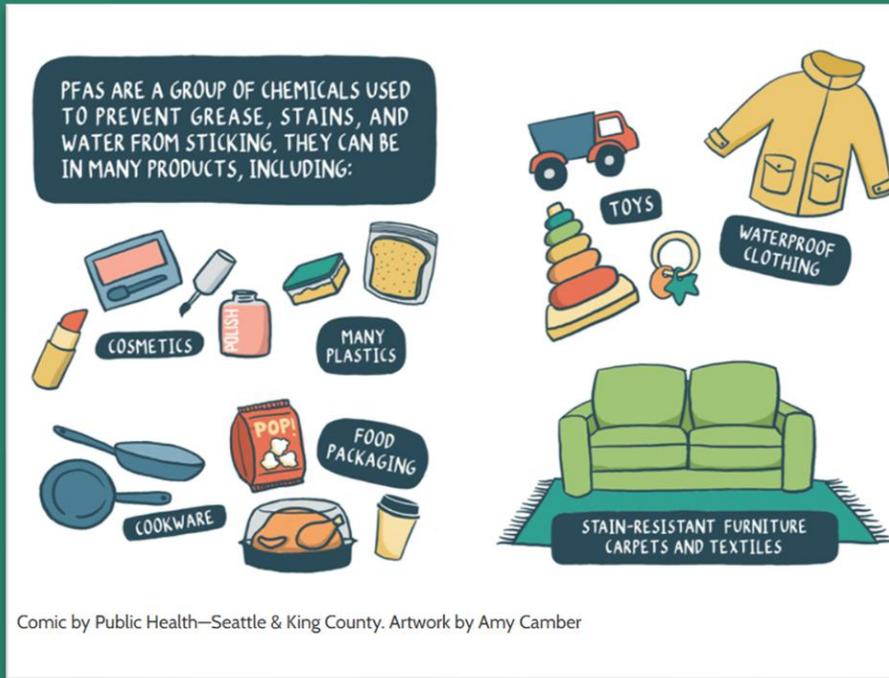
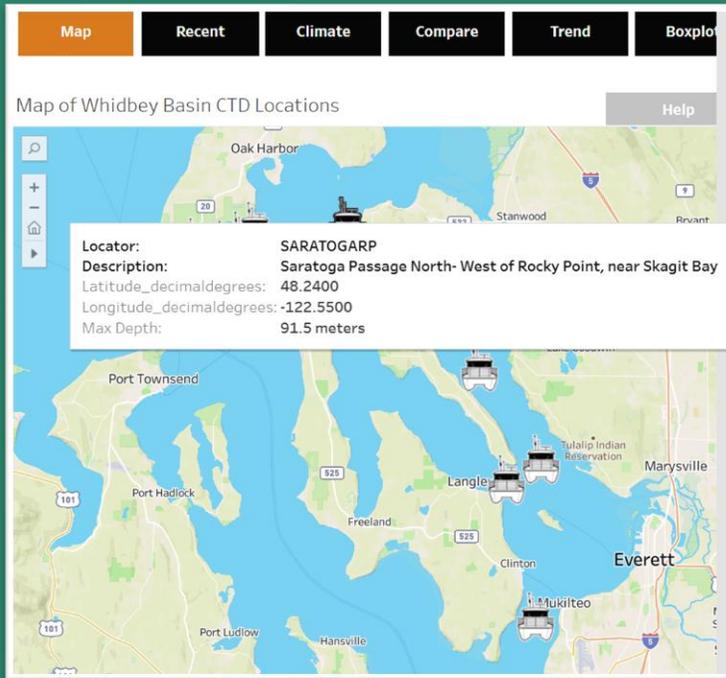
Chemicals of emerging concern continue to pose threats



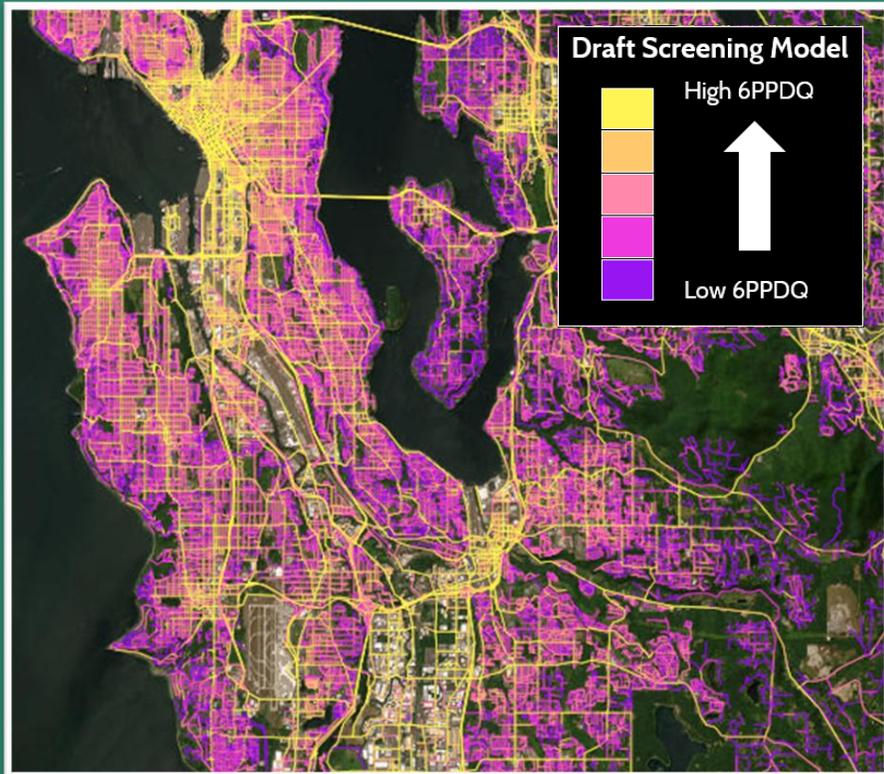
What do we do about this?



We monitor conditions, share data, and partner with local communities and jurisdictions



We pursue cost-effective, evidence-based investments



Why we do this work

