



Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Indicator Report

Executive Summary



Population Health

Insufficient Progress ■

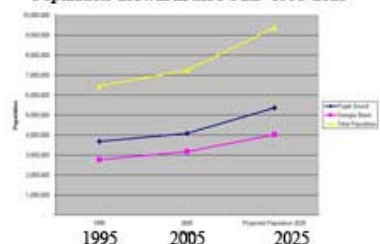
The Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Indicators give a glimpse into the health of our ecosystem, which includes the interactions among seven million people, their health, local economies and a complex system of water, land, plants, animals and microorganisms. This indicator presents population, population growth rates and projections, infant mortality rates, life expectancy and average family income across the Puget Sound Georgia Basin.

By 2025, the region is expected to add another 1.4 million people with no corresponding increase in land, resources or the many ecosystem services that we rely on. Our collective challenge will be to create livable urban communities for this growing population that protect important ecosystem and societal services. These include healthy forests; watersheds and other natural areas that help maintain air quality, river flows, water quality and other natural resources; sustainable farms and soils that provide local sources of food; and the many other amenities and recreational opportunities that make this place special.

What Is Happening?

Between 1976 and 2001, the Puget Sound Georgia Basin added 2.9 million new residents. We are ethnically diverse, increasingly export-oriented and filled with the promise of biotechnology, internet technology, aerospace and tourism. The region also has a higher income profile than other parts of North America with higher rates of consumption and a correspondingly greater impact on the capacity of natural resources. Life expectancy is slightly higher and infant mortality slightly lower in the Georgia Basin compared to Puget Sound. Life expectancy is highest in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (81 years) and King County (80 years), the areas of the basin with the largest populations. Perhaps the most significant finding is the continuing disparity between rural and urban areas on both sides of the border. This urban/rural disparity is apparent across the life expectancy, income, and infant mortality indicators.

Population Growth in the PSGB 1995-2025



Why Is It Happening?

People move to this region for educational opportunities, interesting and relatively well-paying jobs, and the recreational and outdoor-oriented lifestyle opportunities associated with such a diverse and dramatic natural environment, defined by both temperate rain forests and the ubiquitous presence of mountains and water. However, the ability of rural communities to provide needed social and health care services has lagged behind that of the more urban communities.

How Does This Affect Me?

The stakes associated with poor long-term planning and sprawl are very high:

- Poor water quality from chemicals, oils, pathogens, bacteria and higher stream temperatures leaves our rivers, lakes and streams unable to support salmon and other aquatic life. Water quantity is also affected by impervious surfaces, which result in higher flood flows and reduced summer flows.
- Rapid loss of farmland and forestland, particularly around the edges of the urban core, affects local sources of foods, aesthetic views and economic opportunities for rural communities.
- Splitting wildlife habitat with new development stresses animal and plant populations and leads to lost biodiversity.
- Sprawling communities cause increased traffic and air pollution, reduce general livability and require

continued

How Does This Affect Me? *continued*

expensive infrastructure investments like roads, utilities, and other necessary services to cover larger and larger areas.

What Are We Doing About It?

Regional governments, citizens, non-profit organizations and businesses are responding to these challenges by planning for and managing growth, transportation and health care needs and incorporating more effective environmental protection tools. They are using:

- Growth management techniques to provide incentives to keep growth in existing urban areas, support intelligent long-term planning and protect forests and farmland
- Health programs to foster preventative care, prenatal care, exercise and a healthy diet
- Life cycle assessment and ecological economics to uncover the true costs of manufactured products and promote integration of economic analyses to assess the economic worth of ecosystem "services" such as clean water, air and food
- Transportation planning to encourage living near work and using more diverse forms of transportation such as bicycling, buses, walking and rail or even telecommuting and saving a trip
- Natural drainage and landscaping techniques and low impact development approaches to protect local watersheds and resources

What Can I Do?

Your Tool Box

- Live in a well planned community or existing urban area, complete with vibrant social, economic, and recreational opportunities. See Smart Growth BC www.smartgrowth.bc.ca and Smart Growth | Washington www.smartgrowth.wa.gov.
- Use low impact development (LID) and natural landscaping: Puget Sound Action Team | LID www.psat.wa.gov/Programs/LID.htm. Communities can apply for technical professional assistance to incorporate LID in their plans.
- Know your footprint! For home, see My Footprint www.ecofoot.org. For government agencies, see Sustainable Washington www.ecy.wa.gov/sustainability/pathways.
- Live close to work and travel smart: Use a car only when you need one. See Flexcar at www.flexcar.org. See the Bicycle Alliance www.bicyclealliance.org or BC's Better Environmentally Sound Transportation www.best.bc.ca.
- Use your pocketbook to keep your family and community safe: Check out PPRC's green purchasing tools at www.pprc.org. Also see the National Institutes of Health Household Products Database at householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/.
- Live in energy efficient homes and businesses: Green or high performance buildings decrease energy consumption, increase productivity, and are safer and healthier to live in. See Green Buildings BC www.greenbuildingsbc.com. Learn about EPA's Energy Star program www.energystar.gov
- Support working farms and forests: Diverse community landscapes with access to rural lands, local resources, trees and mature vegetation increase the attractiveness of a community and improve quality of life.

Learn more http://www.epa.gov/region10/psgb/indicators/population_health/

Share what's important to you and your community
<http://www.epa.gov/region10/psgb/contact/>



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

The Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Indicators Report is a collaborative effort brought to you by Federal, State, Provincial and Local partners from the United States and Canada.