

Water Quality Governance for Puget Sound: A Collective Choice Perspective

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This paper describes the evolution of institutional arrangements to enhance water quality in Puget Sound. The analytical framework we employ connects the collective goods character of resource management problems like water quality provision to the institutional arrangements that determine who may do what, how actions are monitored, and how rewards and sanctions are administered.

Three emergent programmatic areas are examined: the rural nonpoint pollution control program, sediment management standards, and a program which resulted in standards and site identification for dredged material disposal. Each involved multi-agency participation in its development and attention over an extended period of time. Public conflict varied over time and across programs.

The programs are examined with respect to decision-making strategies employed, functional and geographic scope of institutional arrangements and authority, and the size of the implementing administrative units. In each case the path of program development showed substantial variation along at least one of these dimensions between initial problem identification and the emergence of operational rules. The rural nonpoint pollution problem in particular saw significant variation in all of the factors before a control program coalesced.

The variation observed suggests that the Puget Sound Water Quality Authority has served to catalyze organizational learning about water quality program development. Problems remain that are likely to require further adjustments in institutional arrangements, however, particularly in the nonpoint pollution program.