

*The Metro Story:  
How Citizens  
Cleaned Up  
Lake Washington*

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# *The Metro Story: How Citizens Cleaned Up Lake Washington*

**W**hat can citizen action accomplish in cleaning up polluted waters?

A great deal.

The people of Seattle and its suburbs have proved just how much. Their joint efforts resulted in cleaning up the pollution of Lake Washington and nearby Puget Sound. Citizens elsewhere can learn from Seattle's experience and successfully duplicate it.

Eighty percent of Greater Seattle is surrounded by water. Its residents, crowded between the salt waters of Puget Sound and the fresh waters of Lake Washington, have always made great use of these waters for swimming, fishing and boating. Seattle, in fact, has more pleasure boats per capita than any comparable city in the country.

By 1958, however, the lake had become so polluted that it was declared "unsafe" for swimming, and other recreational activities were almost prohibited. The cause was a profuse growth of algae, stimulated by nutrients discharged into the lake from 10 sewage treatment plants. Green scum collected on the windward shores, and the odor of dying algae was strong, especially in late summer. Beach closures because of bacterial contamination were commonplace. Water visibility was only 2½ feet; 8 years earlier it had been 12 feet.

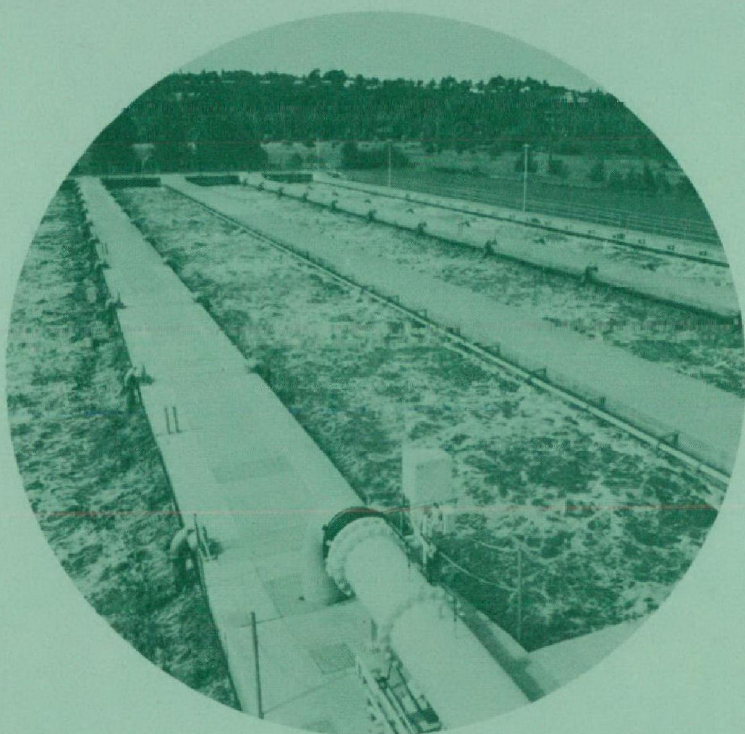
The waters of Puget Sound were also polluted, assaulted by 70 million gallons of raw sewage a day. Its beaches, too, were unsafe for swimming.

Today, all this is changed. The waters are clean, and area residents mean to keep them that way.

How did Seattle residents do it?

They tackled the problem at its source—the fragmentation of metropolitan government as the



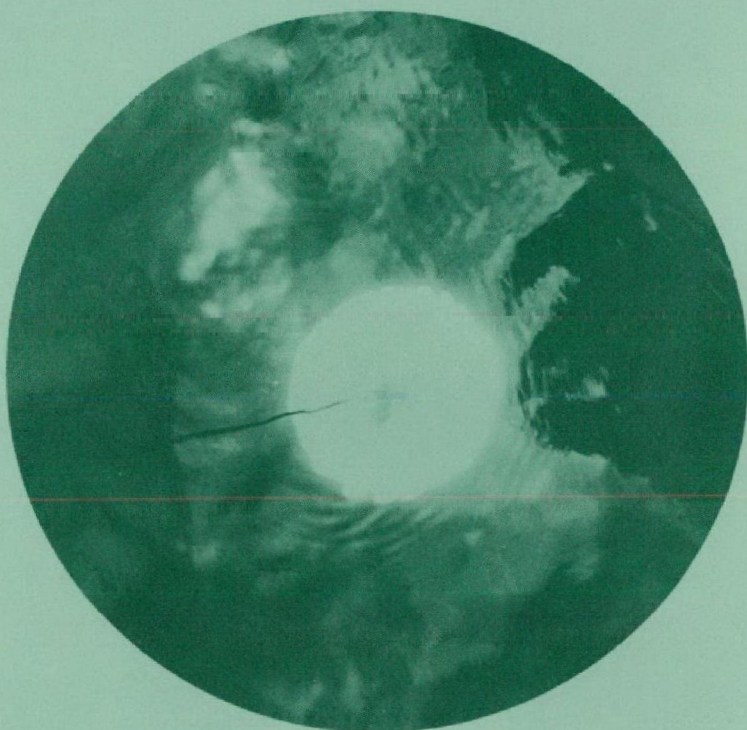


More than 95 percent of the suspended solids from raw sewage are removed by the treatment plant at Renton.



Proving "it can be done", the citizens of the  
Washington. Today, it is once a





Clean Water. Visibility of a white disc is now 12 feet.  
At its worst, pollution had cut visibility to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet.



metropolitan Seattle area cleaned up Lake  
gain a major recreational area.



city's suburbs encircled Lake Washington after World War II. What was needed was a single governmental unit to deal with all the pollution sources in the drainage basins affecting Greater Seattle. The answer the residents came up with was METRO, the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle.

As their first step, concerned citizens persuaded the Washington State Legislature in 1957 to pass an enabling act which permitted the establishment of a metropolitan government with specific functions. Next, they organized to win voter approval of METRO to handle the area's sewage disposal programs. The citizens left few stones unturned. They organized a speakers' bureau which scheduled more than 300 talks over a six-week period. Endorsements were sought and obtained from county conventions of both political parties from mayors and city council members of all incorporated communities that would be affected and from more than 200 civic, sports, community and professional organizations. The public campaign climaxed with 5,000 men, women and children ringing doorbells and delivering information on the METRO proposal. When the votes were counted, METRO had won. The specific powers it was granted included:

- (1) To propose a comprehensive wastewater treatment plan.
- (2) To acquire, construct, operate and regulate the use of metropolitan sewerage.
- (3) To require connection of local systems to metropolitan facilities.
- (4) To fix rates and charges for the use of the facilities.
- (5) To establish minimum standards for the construction of local sewage facilities and to approve plans for their construction.

METRO's pollution abatement programs cover all drainage basins affecting the waters of Greater Seattle. Since 1958, METRO not only has met present needs, it has designed and built facilities to accomodate future economic and population growth.

The basic approach to the cleanup of Lake Washington was construction of a comprehensive system of interceptor sewers to eliminate all discharges into Lake Washington and the raw sewage discharge into Puget Sound. Twenty-eight scattered sewage treatment plants have been replaced by five plants—particularly the large



plants at Renton on the Duwamish River and Westpoint on Puget Sound.

METRO's massive sewerage program was paid for by people of the Seattle area. Expenditures of \$125 million were authorized in 1961 and an additional \$80 million in 1966. Through May 1972, METRO's capital investments totaled \$179 million. Federal grants from the Environmental Protection Agency and its predecessor agency have totaled \$17,580,496.

The waters of Lake Washington are now clean. Damaging discharges have been eliminated. Beaches are open and fully used. But, most important, the cleanup was accomplished by the people of the Seattle area.

The METRO example shows that metropolitan water pollution can be cleaned up. For more detailed information, contact: Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle, 410 West Harrison, Seattle, Washington 98119.

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