

Sammamish River Capital Investment Strategy

Phase 1 Outreach Executive Summary

April 2024



Overview

The King County Flood Control District, together with King County as service provider, is developing the Sammamish River Capital Investment Strategy (Sammamish CIS). The strategy will guide future projects to reduce flood risk, protect fish habitat, and provide other benefits to people and wildlife. The Sammamish CIS will bring management practices up to date with current regulations, plan for future conditions and potentially help some improvement projects get started right away.

The Sammamish CIS is being developed with several phases of public outreach. This document summarizes the community outreach King County conducted in 2023. It also reflects themes of the community's feedback about priorities for the Sammamish River.

Outreach objectives for this phase included:

- Raise awareness about the Sammamish CIS with local communities.
- Understand the needs and concerns of community members regarding infrastructure development and habitat along the Sammamish River.
- Understand the needs of riverside jurisdictions and potential future projects or plans.
- Continue to learn from and understand the communities within the project area, ways to best engage with them, and their priorities.

The project team emphasized equitable engagement strategies and tactics to amplify the voices of those who have been historically excluded from government decision-making processes. This included (but was not limited to) nearby residents living with low incomes, refugee farmers and other small farm managers, people who speak English as a second language, and people who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color.

Community Engagement

Between March and August 2023, the project team gathered input from communities along the Sammamish River. The project team implemented a range of strategies including:

	In-person events In-person events provided a way for community members and interested parties to ask questions, express concerns and ideas, and gain a deeper understanding of the project. • King County attended the Kenmore Farmers Market, Woodinville Farmers Market, and Movies at Marymoor Park.
	Outreach to specific populations Outreach efforts were tailored to engage with groups that have unique needs and perspectives. Activities to reach specific populations included: • Visiting small business farmers, particularly Hmong farmers, at their property.

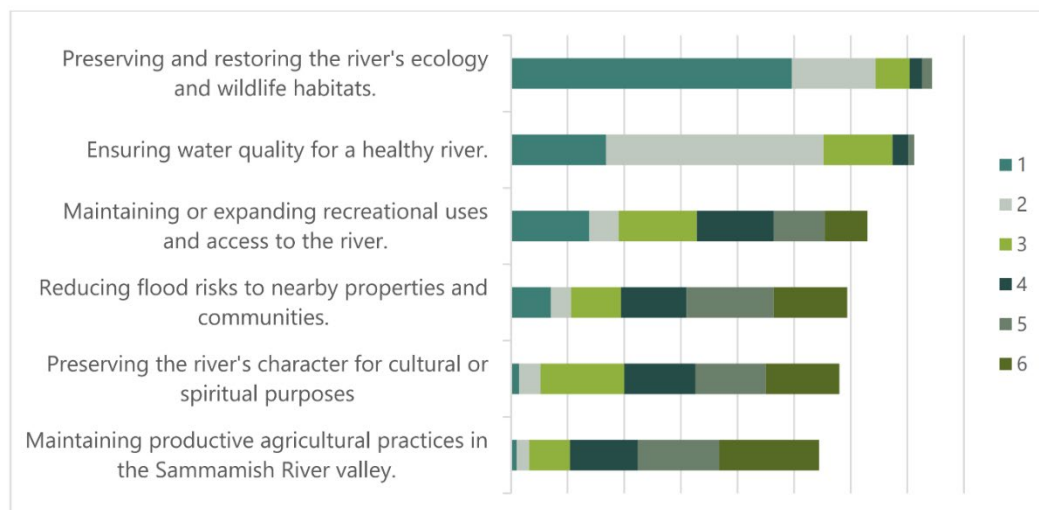
	• Attending the Sammamish Valley Alliance’s Summer Festival to share project materials, such as posters and postcards, to connect with people, and direct them to the online open house and survey. • Delivering flyers to flower vendors who farm in the project area and have stalls at Pike Place Market. The flyers directed them to the project website and online open house. • Working to connect with residents of manufactured home communities along the Sammamish River through phone calls, emails, and visits.
	Community-based organization interviews Interviews with community-based organizations allowed the project team to tap into the knowledge and networks of trusted local groups. The project team interviewed staff from the Disability Empowerment Center and the Sammamish Valley Alliance, whose missions focused on disability rights and small farms, respectively.
	Early Action Project Sponsor Technical Workshop King County brought together riverside jurisdictions and other project sponsors to identify, evaluate, and prioritize near-term or “early action” flood risk reduction and habitat restoration projects along the Sammamish River. There were 17 people in attendance, representing local municipalities, regulatory and permitting agencies, farmers, and environmental non-profit organizations.
	Online open house and survey King County hosted an online open house and survey. The online open house was designed to provide an overview of the Sammamish CIS, its history, and the next steps for the project. The survey, hosted within the online open house, provided insight into how participants interact with the Sammamish River and what priorities they value for the corridor. It was available in English, Spanish, and simplified Chinese. More than 600 people responded to the survey.

Key Highlights

Based on the outreach described above and results from the survey, the project team identified the following highlights and priorities for the Sammamish River corridor.

The survey's findings highlight several important themes regarding community perspectives on the river and its management.

	Survey responses showed significant interest in habitat and invasive species management. This includes restoring riparian habitat, addressing aquatic invasive species, and planting trees along the riverbanks to cool the river and provide shade for salmon and other native species.
	Water quality was a noted concern for human health and habitat. We heard from some respondents a desire to return the river to its historic meandering, pre-channelization state.
	Recreation is vital to the community, notably walking, biking, and wildlife viewing along the river. A small number of respondents enjoyed fishing along the river, and opinions on use of motorized watercraft varied. Several respondents also identified dredging as a solution for sediment accumulation, which causes shallow conditions that impact watercraft.
	When asked about where respondents frequent the river the most, more than 50 percent of respondents noted the riversides at the end of the Sammamish River corridor at Lake Washington, while 20 percent of respondents noted riverside areas at the middle or start of the Sammamish River corridor and Lake Sammamish.
	Respondents were asked to rank the importance of a set of statements about the future of the Sammamish River, 1 being most important and 7 least important. 66 percent of respondents chose "Preserving and restoring the river's ecology and wildlife habitats" as most important. The following statements were ranked:



At community events, table visitors commented on a range of topics, such as:



- Expressing concerns about ecological conditions and water quality.
- Indicating interest in seeing and supporting salmon in the area and using educational signage.
- Reflecting on how they most enjoy the river corridor, including biking on the trail, boat races, and fishing.
- Providing ideas for the project, such as introducing pollinator-friendly plants, installing benches to rest along the trail, incorporating more shade along the trail, and ensuring phone service along the river corridor for public safety.

During conversations with farmers, the project team heard:



- Winter flooding has increased since the 1980s. This affects drying flowers, which is an important crop for Hmong farmers in the winter.
- Concerns about a specific culvert that is impacted by flooding.
- Comments to keep the land rural.
- A desire to save flat river bottoms and river valleys.
- Concern about odors from the river near Kenmore.
- Farmers rely on the river water for pumping to their lawns or farms.
- Farmers and community members may encounter challenges with stormwater runoff and damaged or undersized drainage infrastructure during heavy rain.

During initial conversations with manufactured home communities, feedback included:



- Many of these residents view themselves as “conservationists” and “protectors” of the river.
- Residents described challenging experiences working with King County to receive permits for activities along the Sammamish River.
- Residents described manufactured housing as rare and important low-income housing that should be considered a priority in the plan.

Next steps

King County is using this input to develop draft concept alternatives for the Sammamish CIS. In 2024, we will share proposed concept alternatives with the public in a second phase of outreach, which will include community events, an online open house, and more. King County will use your feedback to inform alternative recommendations provided to the King County Flood Control District for approval.