

WASHINGTON STATE Academy of Sciences

Science in the Service of Washington State

The Washington State Academy of Sciences (WSAS) provides expert scientific and engineering analysis to inform public policy-making, and works to increase the role and visibility of science in the State of Washington.



Independence, Objectivity, and Expertise

Authorized by the state legislature in 2005, WSAS is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation. Its projects and studies are funded from either private or public sources. Modeled after the operational and funding structure of the National Research Council of the U.S. National Academies, WSAS is free of all outside organizational and partisan affiliations that might limit the independence of its work.

WSAS studies provide objective analysis because they are conducted with systematic rigor by carefully appointed scientific committees. Reports are peer-reviewed by independent reviewers and then approved by the WSAS Board of Directors. Great care is taken that analysis and recommendations are free of bias and partisanship and are insulated from special interests.

WSAS studies are undertaken by specialists in the relevant technical fields who are most qualified to complete the analysis and report its conclusions. WSAS provides the specialized expertise planners and policy-makers need to make informed decisions that serve the public interest.

Scientific Leadership, National Reputation

The members of the WSAS are outstanding leaders in their respective fields with a commitment to science in service to the public. All members are nominated and elected by their peers, either directly into the WSAS or by virtue of election to the National Academies—the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine. A significant proportion of members have extensive experience on the National Research Council, the research arm of the National Academies.

Advising Decision-Makers

WSAS provides authoritative scientific analysis on a host of challenging public issues—including, among others, health, transportation, agriculture, energy, biodiversity preservation, biotechnology, climate change, and education. Its reports contain reliable, non-partisan scientific analysis that enables decision-makers to do their job with the best possible scientific and technical information at hand.

WSAS does not recommend policy. It does not accept commissions for studies designed to advocate particular legislation. Its studies and resultant peer-reviewed and board-approved reports provide the basis for informed public discussion and decision.

WSAS Projects

WSAS serves the State of Washington and its citizens by conducting commissioned studies on specific topics and preparing scientific reports on issues of public importance. Its studies can inform policy decisions, enable new research initiatives, or provide program review and assessment.

Projects may be commissioned by the governor, legislature, state agencies, local governments, or other entities.

Studies are organized to answer carefully defined scientific and technical questions. They are conducted by committees with the appropriate expertise and with balanced perspectives. Reports are peer-reviewed and approved by the WSAS board. As a result, study conclusions provide sponsors with the most authoritative, independent analysis possible.

An Example Project: The Puget Sound Partnership

WSAS was commissioned by statute to assist the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) in its efforts to protect and restore Puget Sound. Fifteen names of experts were recommended to the PSP's Leadership Council. From this list of nominees, the council selected a nine-member science panel to advise it on ecological and human issues related to Puget Sound conservation, recovery, and management.

WSAS was retained to conduct interim assessments of progress in the PSP's implementation of its 2020 Action Agenda. The WSAS Review Committee analyzed whether the environmental indicators and benchmarks included in the action agenda accurately measured and reflected progress toward the PSP's restoration goals. The review was published in August 2012.

Criteria for undertaking a study by the WSAS include the following:

- There is relevant and sufficient scientific information available on the issue to be addressed
- Existing reports, if any, are out of date or inadequate
- Sufficient funds are provided by the sponsor to cover study expenses, staff costs, and study-related overhead

Study committee members serve without compensation.

Typically, studies move through four phases: statement of task; committee formation; analysis and report preparation; and report review, approval, and publication. Each of the phases is designed to ensure that the analyses and evaluations of information provided to sponsors are of the highest quality.

Statement of Task

When a sponsor contracts with WSAS for a project, staff from the sponsor and WSAS work together to focus on the exact questions the study will answer. This step is critical for effective results. It limits the proposed information-gathering and analysis and mandates the kind of report required. It allows WSAS to determine if the project can be successfully undertaken and to decide if the request is consistent with its independent, objective, non-partisan mission.

For further information on WSAS projects and for questions about how to commission a study, contact Robert Bates, Executive Director.

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