CONSERVE TO PRESERVE: HOW CITIES AND CITIZENS CAN COLLABORATE TO PROTECT WATER RESOURCES

Session: In-Person

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Water is an indispensable resource, essential to human life and ecosystem vitality. Despite this, in many areas, there are evident impacts from climate change, such as longer, hotter, drier summer seasons and changing precipitation patterns. These climate changes paired with expanding populations are putting a strain on water resources such as those located in Washington, demonstrating a need for solutions. The purpose of this study was to understand how small cities such as Chehalis, Washington, can reduce water use through water conservation strategies. To accomplish this, I conducted research through public outreach, citizen surveys, expert interviews, and a literature review via an internship with the Chehalis Basin Partnership. Chehalis citizens were surveyed to understand their perceptions and preferences regarding different water conservation actions. Additionally, experts were interviewed to understand the successes and challenges of water conservation strategy implementation in cities near Chehalis. A thematic analysis of interviews along with current literature revealed four main important municipal water conservation actions which include water conservation plan development, water policy mechanisms, municipal infrastructure improvements, and public outreach and education. Further research determined how government and citizen-level action can be streamlined to successfully conserve water resources for both current and future needs. Addressing the pressing issues of water conservation requires cities to lead by example while including citizens and providing means for their engagement when implementing solutions. These results evoke findings important for cities, even those outside of Washington, to improve water conservation efforts and more broadly promote government-citizen collaboration in solving environmental issues.