



Operations & Maintenance Manager Profile Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District

The Organization

While headquartered in the city of Bellingham, Washington, the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District's service area surrounds Lake Whatcom to the east and includes the communities of Geneva, Sudden Valley, and the North Shore of Lake Whatcom.

Founded in 1968, the District operates as a special purpose district authorized under Title 57 Revised Code of Washington. The District provides water and/or sewer service to a population of approximately 11,000 customers within an 18 square mile area located wholly within the environmentally sensitive Lake Whatcom watershed. The District is operated by 13 full time staff represented by AFSCME and five full time non-represented staff, a five-member board of commissioners, and has an annual budget of approximately \$8 million, which includes approximately \$1.5 million for capital improvement program projects and equipment.

The natural terrain, proximity to Lake Whatcom, and various residential communities make operating water and sewer utilities unique and challenging. The District operates a water treatment plant that provides water to Sudden Valley and Geneva residents via five reservoirs, five pump stations, and 70 miles of transmission and distribution lines. On the north shore near Agate Bay, the District provides water service by a well and water treatment plant, one pump station, and two reservoirs. The District also distributes water purchased from the city of Bellingham to its Eagleridge neighborhood customers. All water distributed by the District meets or surpasses regulatory standards—the District has received the Washington State Department of Health's TOP Award for over 20 consecutive years of regulatory compliance at its Sudden Valley treatment plant.

The District owns and operates 28 sewer lift stations and over 75 miles of sewage collection and conveyance lines located on both the north and south shores of Lake Whatcom. The District does not treat the sewage it collects, instead delivering its wastewater to the city of Bellingham's treatment plant for treatment and disposal under the terms of an interlocal agreement that expires in 2034. The District pays for treatment on a negotiated volumetric basis and is responsible for funding nearly 5% of the cost of capital improvements to the plant, which equates to the percentage of plant capacity required by the District.

The Position

Under the direction of the General Manager, this position serves as a member of the management team and is responsible for the leadership and management of operation and maintenance of the District's public water and wastewater systems. The incumbent manages the Operations Department, which is comprised of eight full time professionals, and is responsible for ensuring that systems operate in compliance with all applicable federal, state and local regulations, and that District policies and procedures are followed to provide safe, dependable and cost-effective service to District customers. Operations Department staff work a 4-day 10-hour schedule during spring, summer, and fall, then rotate to a traditional 5-day shift during the winter.

Other responsibilities include:

- Maintains District assets such as building, pump station and treatment plant facilities, equipment, and tools in a condition ready for emergency response;
- Supervises, directs and addresses personnel functions of department staff;
- Works independently within the District's established policies and procedures, as well as industry standards;
- Develops, refines and implements written standard operating procedures for safety, emergency response, and common work tasks;
- Serves on the District's Safety Committee in the review and implementation of safety programs, and coordinates training, conducts audits, and inspects work sites on a regular basis;
- Implements the District's asset management program to collect, measure and analyze resources used during O&M tasks, and reviews performance output to identify trends and recommend capital and operational changes to continually improve service efficiency;
- Recommends physical improvements necessary or desirable to maintain or improve operation of water and sewer systems;
- Assists in utility business planning and rate studies, and prepares and operates within an annual budget for assigned areas of responsibility;
- Assists with emergency preparedness planning and training, and response during emergency events, including ensuring staff, equipment, vehicles, tools and materials are maintained in a ready state for deployment;
- Works closely with the Engineering Department on multiple programs, including: inspection of new water/sewer connections and coordination with contractors; capital construction projects, developer extension agreement projects; capital improvement program; cross-connection control program; SCADA system configuration, maintenance and improvements; and asset and work management program.

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Significant range of field crew age. The District's Operations Department consists of employees ranging from just beginning their careers to over 30-years' service. The incumbent will face the challenge of training, leading, and managing a team with members from multiple generations, personalities, career goals, and expectations.
2. Staff cross-training and job proficiency maintenance. Operations Department staff are required to hold and maintain multiple certifications including: Water Treatment Plant Operator 2, Water Distribution Manager 2, Cross-Connection Specialist and Wastewater Collection Specialist 1. Department staff are on a rotational schedule to provide 24-hour emergency response. The challenge will be to keep staff proficient performing specialized work using their certifications while maintaining a broad knowledge of District assets needed for emergency response.
3. Standard operating procedures. Written SOPs need to be developed and implemented for operations, maintenance, repairs, safety, and emergency response. The incumbent will play a key role in coordinating, planning, developing, writing, implementing, training, and refining District-wide SOPs.
4. Asset Management. Scheduled and unscheduled maintenance tasks are managed in the District asset management program. The incumbent will continue implementation, and expansion as appropriate, of the asset management program by department staff. Completing the asset inventory is paramount to complete the goals identified in the Strategic Business Plan. Inspection of all sewer mains and manholes must be completed within 3-years to establish a current condition of the assets.

5. Safety program. The District has developed many safety programs that require consistent implementation in the field through regular training, safety meetings, safety audits, and practices. The incumbent will be expected to encourage continual implementation of the safety program.
6. Strategic Business Plan. The District 6-year plan launched in 2022 is focused on operational optimization and infrastructure strategy and performance. Meeting the goals of the plan with limited personnel will be challenging.
7. Whatcom County watershed restrictions limit land disturbance activity exceeding 500 square feet to June 1—October 1. The compressed construction season requires careful planning to complete projects in a timely manner.
8. Aging sewer infrastructure in the Sudden Valley area has contributed to high levels of inflow and infiltration (I&I). Locating the affected areas and working collaboratively with the engineering department to complete the repairs is a top priority.

Ideal Candidate

The ideal candidate will possess a thorough knowledge of the principles and practices of water and wastewater systems, including applicable federal and state laws; asset management program implementation; fiscal and record management; and public administration theory and best practices. The ideal candidate will also have experience in working in a utility operations management capacity for another similarly sized local government in Washington State. Other desired attributes include:

- Good interpersonal skills and habits;
- Strong work ethic with the ability to consistently lead by example;
- The ability to provide excellent customer service and interact tactfully, professionally, and courteously with customers, other members of the public, and District staff;
- Experience and ability in supervising, evaluating, training, and motivating staff;
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills with the ability to confidently provide presentations in public meetings and write detail-oriented and accurate reports;
- Ability to analyze and solve a variety of complex operational problems; and
- Be forward thinking.

Education and Experience

A bachelor's degree in civil engineering, management, public administration or a related field desired, with a minimum of five years of progressively responsible experience with complex program and project management in both public water and sewer collection systems required. Technical experience in electrical, mechanical, pumps, hydraulics and controls is required. Candidates with Water Treatment Plant Operator 2, Water Distribution Manager 2, Wastewater Collection 3, or comparable certifications preferred (required within two years of employment).

Compensation and Benefits

- \$98,600-124,700 per year, DOQ
- medical, dental and vision insurance
- Washington Public Employees Retirement System (PERS)
- Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA) contribution
- 12 paid holidays
- sick leave
- paid vacation

The Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All qualified candidates are strongly encouraged to apply by August 8, 2022 (first review, open until filled). Applications, supplemental questions, resumes and cover letters will only be accepted electronically in Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) format. Please submit applications to jobs@lwbsd.org. All required application-related documents, as well as additional information regarding the District and this position, are available on the District's website at: <https://lwbsd.org/about-us/careers/>.



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