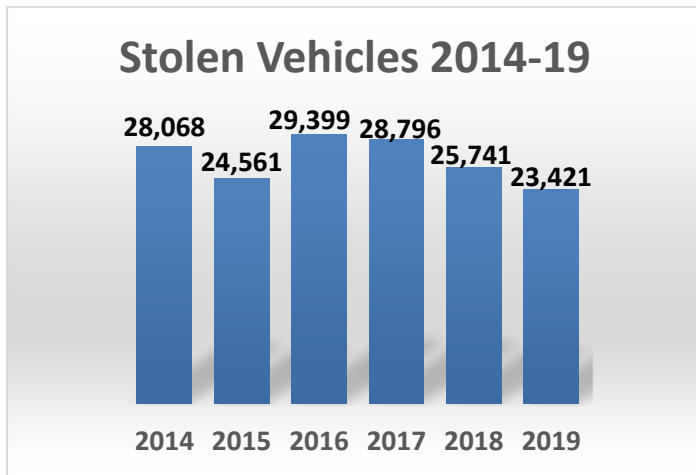***Background:*** The Washington Auto Theft Prevention Authority (WATPA) was established when the Elizabeth Novak-Washington Auto Theft Prevention Act (E3SHB 1001) was signed into law and became effective July 1, 2007.

Washington remains at #4 nationally

Auto theft in Washington decreased 6% (per capita) in 2018 from 2017. Preliminary data for 2019 indicate continued decline of near 10% in overall auto theft. Reasons for the recent decline include targeted enforcement of chronic offenders, consistent prosecution and enhanced technology by vehicle manufacturers.

Stolen Vehicles 2014-19

Year	Stolen Vehicles
2014	28,068
2015	24,561
2016	29,399
2017	28,796
2018	25,741
2019	23,421

As of 2018 (the most current year for FBI statistics) Washington remains one of the top states for auto theft. Washington's population is 7.5M and in states with population between 5m and 15m residents, Washington is ranked #1 in both total number and per capita auto theft. Auto theft in Washington continues to be a major problem that not only places working families and businesses in financial distress due to loss of transportation but also results in increased insurance premiums that ultimately effect all insured residents. Auto theft education is invaluable to the public as demonstrated through this TVW field report, https://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2019081015.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
1	CA	CA	CA	CA	CA	CA
2	TX	TX	TX	TX	TX	TX
3	FL	FL	FL	FL	FL	FL
4	**WA**	**WA**	**WA**	**WA**	**WA**	**WA**
5	GA	GA	GA	GA	GA	GA
6	MI	MI	IL	MI	CO	CO
7	IL	OH	OH	IL	IL	TN
8	OH	AZ	MO	OH	OH	OH
9	AZ	IL	AZ	CO	MO	MO
10	MO	MO	CO	AZ	MI	IL
Source: 2018 DOJ FBI Uniform Crime Report						

2019 Accomplishments

Snohomish County Auto Theft (SNOCAT) Task Force (Everett and North Puget Sound area):

WATPA funds a Supervisor, three Detectives, a Prosecutor, and legal assistant in Snohomish County known as the SNOCAT (Snohomish County Auto Theft) Task Force. The prosecutor is embedded with task force detectives and provides a unique and highly effective auto crimes enforcement team that is a model in Washington.

SNOCAT continues to be a strong leader in the areas of prevention through public outreach. Twitter is the primary social media platform utilized by SNOCAT (@SnoCoAutoTheft) and has 1,470 verified followers that is used to quickly share information for vehicle theft prevention, public outreach, and case investigation. During the summer of 2019 two SnoCAT detectives presented at the Snohomish County Sheriff's Citizen's Academy to approximately 55 community members. The following are several examples of superior enforcement work done by SNOCAT detectives in 2019.

SnoCAT detectives assisted Marysville PD with the recovery of a vehicle that had been located using LoJack (vehicle tracking technology installed by dealerships at the request of owners). The vehicle was found unoccupied in south Marysville and an alert Marysville officer observed a subject walking toward the vehicle and noted a change in behavior. The officer ran the name over the radio and a task force detective immediately recognized the subject as a known auto thief. SnoCAT detectives canvased the neighborhood and located surveillance video of subject arriving in the vehicle and running away from it. Detectives interview the subject, who denied being associated with the vehicle. He quickly changed his story once he observed the surveillance video.

SNOCAT detectives were made aware of a suspect who purchased a $12,000 Kawasaki motorcycle by fraud. The suspect was captured on video and detectives were able to identify the suspect and an arrest was made by Arlington PD. SnoCAT detectives searched a storage unit in Arlington associated with the suspect where the Kawasaki motorcycle was recovered. The suspect is now facing 17 felony charges.

DPA Travis Johnson is a veteran prosecutor with the Snohomish County Prosecutor's Office. In 2019 he reviewed 292 cases referred for prosecution that resulted in criminal filing of 114 individual cases, this included 142 charges for auto theft or possessing stolen property.

Puget Sound Auto Theft Task Force (PSATT) – King and Pierce Counties

It is noteworthy that PSATT is made up of 10 Detectives, two Supervisors, a Prosecutor and a Crime Analysis Specialist. Of these assets less than 50% of the task force is funded by WATPA. The balance of staff is fully funded by local law enforcement and the Washington State Patrol (WSP).

PSATT is very active with community outreach and social media. Detectives has a strong and active presence on both Facebook and Twitter and have established strong relationships with local media outlets that are routinely publishing crime bulletins on their behalf. These relationships multiple the breadth and scope of crime information and has been highly effective in recovery of vehicles and capture of prolific criminals. Examples of superior work in 2019 include:

PSATT learned of Polaris side by side (snowmobiles) and trailer was stolen in Pierce County. PSATT developed a suspect and through a joint effort involving Lakewood PD and WSP executed a search warrant on a residence in Spanaway. Both the trailer and snowmobiles were recovered as well as a stolen RPod camper trailer taken from King County. This case had very strong social media outreach through both Facebook and Twitter.

A subject purchased several cars from Insurance Auto Auction in Washington and Oregon using fraudulent checks. The suspect was identified by PSAAT detectives which resulted in the suspect's arrest and multiple stolen vehicle being recovered.

Spokane Police Department (Spokane metro a rea and northeast Washington):

During 2019 the auto theft rate has continued to decrease in Spokane County, resulting in a 23% drop in auto thefts when compared to the same period in 2018. The majority of the auto thefts that continue to occur throughout Spokane County is a crime of opportunity where the vehicles are stolen and used as simple modes of transportation and/or to commit additional crimes. Several prolific Spokane area auto theft suspects are also active in our northern counties. These individuals are also involved in criminal activity above and beyond auto theft. The following are several short anecdotes.

A Stevens County investigation resulted in the arrest of four suspects. During the investigation, detectives identified an organized group who was using a stolen vehicles to commit multiple residential burglaries in Stevens County and were also linked to two home invasion robberies in Spokane County.

Spokane task force detectives cultivated a source of information that contacted the task force and relayed information on several classic cars that were stolen during a residential burglary in Spokane. Detectives ultimately recovered two of the vehicles (1966 Chevelle and 1941 Plymouth Business Coupe) and developed probable cause to charge two suspects in the case.

In a short five week period the task force executed four illegal wrecking yard search warrants. Three of the four search warrants resulted in the recovery of stolen vehicles and/or stolen major component parts. In addition, two of the four search warrants resulted in the seizure of multiple firearms that were in the possession of convicted felons.

The Spokane County Sheriff's Office asked for assistance from the task force with a problem house in the Spokane Valley where neighbors complained of loud noises throughout the night and suspected the occupants were operating a "Chop Shop". Task force detectives ultimately executed a search warrant and discovered an illegal wrecking yard where eleven individuals lived in a small dwelling and in a RV in the backyard. Detectives located major component parts, to include the engine and transmission, from a stolen GMC pickup and arrested several of the occupants on outstanding arrest warrants.

Clark County Prosecutor's Office

Deputy Prosecuting Attorneys (DPA) Kristen Arnaud and Alyssa Halstrom screened 266 individual cases and of those referrals filed 160 cases with auto theft and/or possession of stolen property criminal charges. Five cases were taken to trial that resulted in guilty verdicts and 139 cases resulted in plea bargains.

Relationships are everything in law enforcement and both prosecutors work closely with local law enforcement by delivering training classes at Clark County Sheriff's office. They also make themselves available for case development and guidance that greatly assists successful prosecution.

Value added support to Washington Criminal Justice agencies beyond task force and prosecutorial funding

- **Washington Chapter** of the Western States Auto Theft Investigators (WSATI) was provided funding to assist with training to over 100 detectives, analysts and prosecutors at events in both eastern and Western Washington.
- **Sumner PD p**urchased 100 Auto Theft Task Force steering wheel locks and 63 Club Twin Hooks steering wheel locks (for SUVs) and used local media sources (Facebook, Twitter, e-newsletter) to inform the public of the intent to distribute the devices to owners of vehicles that appeared on the NICB's 2017 America's 10 Most Stolen Vehicles.
- **University Place PD** provided prevention to local park users about the importance of removing valuables from their vehicles when they use the park and to also encourage them to not leave valuables in their vehicles anytime they leave the vehicle parked or unattended. Officers who have participated in the project, so far, report "receptive and thankful" residents.
- **Mattawa PD** conducted a media campaign via social media, community meetings and traditional poster/flyer distribution to educate the public on auto theft prevention. All educational material was bilingual (English/Spanish). Posters were placed in local businesses and complimented with social media posts. Officers and community members reported very positive contacts that help bridge cultural gaps between the residents and the police department.

Stolen cars are not just an inconvenience. Many victims are financially devastated, and for others it can end in tragedy. https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article235411242.html

https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/man-pleads-return-work-truck-stolen-red-lion-inn-auburn