

# **San Juan Initiative**

## **Issue Paper for Sept. 17, 2009 Policy Group Meeting**

In the next few months, the San Juan Initiative staff will design and co-host a series of public engagement workshops in support of updating the Critical Areas Ordinance, identify focus to scope a terrestrial assessment, finalize/agree to measures for the long term success of the Initiative, and establish an ongoing institutional structure for implementation.

This paper provides background information, issues and decisions necessary to move these efforts forward.

### **Section 1: Critical Areas Ordinance Public Engagement**

#### **Overview**

The Critical Area Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program are two key tools that the County uses to protect San Juan's ecosystems. The County Council, in partnership with the Planning Commission, will review and adopt a new Critical Area Ordinance this fall. The Council will also make a key decision about the timing and integration of the SMP with the CAO work. These regulatory tools have the potential to significantly impact the San Juan community. The County Council and County Administrator want an informed public dialogue this fall that results in a more effective Planning Commission review of the CAO update and assists the Council in determining the best process for beginning the Shoreline Master Program update. Currently the Planning Commission is scheduled to receive the CAO update for their review in late October and complete their process in November. The Council has not yet decided to also amend portions of the Shoreline Master Program this fall. They have decided to begin the required comprehensive update of the Shoreline Master Program in January, 2010.

In August, the County Council endorsed a proposal to partner with the San Juan Initiative staff to design and co-host a public engagement process in advance of the Planning Commission review. This work will be guided by a Council-appointed steering committee which includes: Patty Miller, Amy Windrope, Susan Dehlendorf (Planning Commission) and Shireene Hale. The Policy Group will not play a formal role in the planning or execution of this community engagement.

The objectives for the public engagement process include:

1. Connect to and understand the concerns and fears of the San Juan Community.
2. Provide factual information in direct dialogue with the public and work to diminish misinformation and unsubstantiated concerns.

3. Clarify issues critical for the Council to consider as they seek to update the Critical Areas Ordinance.
4. Provide feedback on options for the Council to consider in their decision-making.
5. Increase the likelihood that Council can create a CAO and SMP process that both protects ecosystems and meet community needs.

To achieve these outcomes, the public engagement process would include:

1. A paper that outlines the basic issues, implications for land owners, benefits to the environment and the key policy issues that must be decided by the County Council.
2. Open field trips on Lopez, Orcas and San Juan Islands to illustrate and discuss with community leaders and the public on-the-ground situations that would be affected by the CAO Update. These field trips would be open to the public with specific recruitment focused on key community leaders.
3. Three public meetings facilitated by a professional. These public meetings would have a panel format with different scientific, community, and policy viewpoints represented. The goal would be for the public to discuss the range of opinions and how the current proposal reflects these opinions.
4. Revision of issue papers to reflect public opinion and refined ideas for how to best address protection of the environment while supporting land owners.

There are no decisions needed by the Policy Group at this time but your input on the design of the outreach would be helpful to staff. We will brief you at the meeting on the details and ask for your feedback.

## **Section 2: Terrestrial Assessment**

### **Overview**

The Policy Group seeks to ultimately understand the entire San Juan ecosystem, both marine and terrestrial, and ensure that efforts taken to protect these systems are effective. In 2007, the Policy Group decided to first focus on the marine system and then continue their work by assessing the second highest priority – terrestrial habitats.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has provided a grant to the San Juan Initiative to scope an assessment of protection programs and develop a funding proposal for a detailed case study. The case study, similar to the one developed for the shoreline, would determine what is and is not working in San Juan's efforts to protect its terrestrial habitats and ecosystems.

In order to begin this scoping work, the Policy Group must identify the key habitats and threats within the terrestrial system on which to focus our assessment.

To assist the Policy Group in this decision, staff reviewed the San Juan County Land Bank Habitat Conservation Plan, Willamette Valley- Puget Trough- Georgia Basin Eco-regional Assessment, San Juan County Watershed Management Action Plan and Characterization Report, Washington Biodiversity Council's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, and San Juan Island National Historical Park Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.

Based on these documents we believe four habitats represent the best focus:

- coastal prairies
- oak woodlands
- high quality wetlands
- large intact forests

We have asked both local and regional managers and scientists to review and confirm that these are the most important habitats to protect in the San Juan Islands. We will bring to the Policy Group meeting the results of this review.

In the previous ranking of threats in 2007, single family residential development was called out specifically as impacting terrestrial habitat quality, quantity and connectivity. In order to assess protection effectiveness, we need to understand which residential development actions are the most damaging. Various reports cite the following threats associated with new and existing single family residential development:

- Impacts can increase with population growth (continued growth is projected in San Juan County).
- Fresh water quality is threatened due to septic failure associated with existing and future development.
- Surface water processes are impacted including alteration of stream flow, increased impoundments, and degradation of wetlands due to cumulative impacts of development and storm water runoff. Changes to surface water can impact aquifer recharge ability and impact animals reliant on stream flow and natural hydrology.
- Increasing the number of houses in fire-prone areas create a need for fire suppression, which disrupts natural fire cycles.
- Loss of biodiversity due to fragmentation and isolation effects habitats and corridors.

In addition to threats associated with single-family residential development, other key threats have emerged through our initial research and discussion. These additional threats are:

- Fire suppression
- Invasive species
- Land conversion for Agricultural Processes
- Conversion of land from open prairie or oak woodland to Douglas Fir forest – which reduces biodiversity locally and regionally

- Livestock grazing
- Climate Change
- Recreational Use

We have asked local and regional scientists and managers to prioritize threats based on the habitat type and provide us their rationale for why various threats are more or less critical to address. We will bring to the Policy Group meeting the results of this review to help inform the discussion. Staff will provide a recommendation for habitats and threats at the meeting. We must prioritize the habitat types we are interested in focusing on and the threats to those habitat types.

**Question for the Policy Group:**

After briefing you on the results from the experts at our meeting next week, we will ask for your feedback on the priority habitats and threats.

**Section 3: Measuring Success**

**Overview:**

Staff has incorporated key suggestions from the Policy Group Meeting of May 28<sup>th</sup> regarding how success of the San Juan Initiative could be measured. The changes recommended by the Policy Group can be summarized as follows:

1. Make the monitoring simpler.
2. Tie the monitoring to the ecological outcomes and data collected as part of our case study characterization.

This section describes the work we hope to accomplish in the next few months as well as the outcomes to monitor in the future. Staff has developed an overarching suite of objectives with specific measurable outcomes over three time horizons: near term (December, 2009), medium term (December 2010), and long term (December 2012). Staff will produce a strategy and work plan for how the monitoring will occur, who will be responsible, and what it will cost.

**Overall Objectives for Success in the Marine Ecosystem**

1. More vegetation is retained in the development of new homes.
2. There are less bulkheads/armoring along feeder bluffs and soft shore beaches.
3. Builders, realtors, community leaders, county officials and the public believe there is a strong working relationship in which each party is respected for their role in protecting the environment.
4. Property owners have easy access to technical assistance for how best to maintain views, create access to the shoreline, and protect the shoreline.

**Monitoring Future Outcomes**

**By December 2009**

1. Commitment by the County Council that the tailored approach and other key SJI recommendations for marine shorelines will be considered as part of the Shoreline Master Program update.
2. New property owner recognition program initiated by the Conservation District that builds on the Shore Steward program with Beachwatchers.
3. Post-construction inspections are occurring.
4. An on-going structure for implementation and monitoring is in place.
5. Puget Sound Partnership is contributing funding for implementation and monitoring of the San Juan Initiative recommendations.
6. "Key Steps" document outlining the SJI process for use by other communities.

**By December 2010**

1. No new bulkheads have been constructed without a permit, and a new soft shore beach project or threatened structure relocation has been completed.
2. 75% of all exemption and substantial development permits have had post-construction inspections to ensure compliance with permit.
3. Riparian vegetation in the case study area is unchanged at 88% or sample of residential properties with new homes shows intact buffer vegetation
4. 20 properties have received the green stewardship recognition from the Conservation District
5. Web-site is operating and gets frequent hits.

**By December 2012**

1. No new bulkheads have been constructed since the end of 2010. There are 5 new soft shore projects or threatened structure relocations completed.
2. Riparian vegetation on properties within the case study areas has not decreased below 85% on any individual property. – I don't understand what this means.
3. 50 properties have received the green stewardship recognition since 2009?.
4. Surveys of builders, property owners and County staff demonstrate that they feel their collective efforts are successfully developing and maintaining properties in a manner that protects ecosystem functions and promotes community, business and government stewardship.

**Policy Group Questions:**

1. What refinements to the four objectives should be made?
2. We have two meetings remaining in the San Juan Initiative process, are the stated outcomes for December 2009 reasonable and do you support them?
3. Is anything missing that is critical for you to feel Initiative has achieved its goals?

## **Section 4: Institutional Structure for Implementing SJI Recommendations**

### **Overview**

The Policy Group decided to formally end the San Juan Initiative at the end of 2009. However, staff was directed to explore options for ensuring that the work of the Initiative continues, especially the monitoring components. In a parallel process, the Puget Sound Partnership is beginning an effort to support integration of the Puget Sound Action Agenda at the local level. This section provides background on the Partnership's initial work with local groups. At our Policy Group meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup>, we would like your feedback on the objectives and criteria for integrating the work of the Initiative and its recommendations with the work of the Partnership. We would also like your changes or additions to the options we should consider for the ongoing institution.

The Puget Sound Partnership's Action Agenda, adopted on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 sets the course for achieving a healthy Puget Sound by 2020. Recognizing that local organizations are the cornerstone of Sound protection and restoration efforts, the Partnership is launching its effort to work directly with local communities to integrate, implement and advance Action Agenda priorities. The Partnership will support local communities in playing a central role in implementing the Action Agenda on their own terms. The Partnership's proposal (described below) and September 16<sup>th</sup> meeting in Friday Harbor is intended to begin a dialogue at the local level. The Partnership will identify financial and other support resources for entities that conduct the on-the-ground work prioritized in the Action Agenda.

### **Partnership Goals and Expectations of Local Integrating Organizations:**

"Integrating Organizations" are simply groups on the ground that implement and foster the actions set forth in the Action Agenda. These groups specifically are asked to:

- Advise the Partnership on local priorities relative to the needs put forth in the Action Agenda.
- Provide assistance to enhance implementation efforts by local groups.
- Work cooperatively to implement strategic actions in the Action Agenda.
- Base work on the best scientific information available.
- Evaluate progress implementing the Action Agenda at the local scale relative to goals and desired outcomes.
- Report on implementation actions.

They are called "integrating" organizations because it is their responsibility to work across environmental silos and ensure that salmon recovery, water quality, water quantity, protection of habitat and other factors key to the protection and restoration of Puget Sound are all being advanced in a strategic and timely fashion, even if the work is being conducted by a wide variety of groups and organizations.

### **Partnership Criteria and process for selecting local integrating organizations:**

The Partnership is using two criteria in their selection of a local integrating organization. These are:

- Strong support from the local community
- Strong capacity to execute roles, responsibilities and the scope of work.

Tribes and local governments may choose to make a joint recommendation to the Partnership identifying a local integrating organization and proposing an initial scope of work. A local group can also petition the Partnership directly. The Leadership Council then decides to recognize the local integration organization and accept the proposed scope of work.

### **Initial San Juan Initiative Staff Work with Local Groups**

On July 29, 2009, San Juan Initiative, Marine Resources Committee and Lead Entity staff and the citizen chairs of these groups met for a preliminary discussion on changing/improving existing local structures to ensure implementation of the Action Agenda and implementation of the San Juan Initiative recommendations. The desired outcome of the discussion was to brainstorm new structures that could build on the success of the SJI, the MRC, and the salmon recovery program. The discussion also focused on how these organizations could inform the integration work proposed by the Partnership to result in a coordinated and efficient system to manage San Juan County's natural resources and ecosystems.

Potential structures for local integration:

- A natural resources department of the County
- The MRC moves to a non-County organization and expands role to include integration function
- Expand existing MRC focus to include terrestrial components
- A new committee that brings together one person from each of the committees that manage, update and ensure implementation of the various natural resource plans:
  - ARC, MRC, Water Resources Committee, CD

As part of the discussion, we also identified a process for recommending a local integrating organization that could address the future of the San Juan Initiative work and meet the Partnership's goals. This process would include:

- A core team / steering committee. Using the existing Action Agenda core team seems to make the most sense. To this core team would need to be added: Conservation District Water resources Committee member and someone involved with stormwater planning. The idea is to include in this group representatives of people from the organizations responsible for the various management plans: MSA Plan, SJI recommendations, Watershed Plan etc.

- Authorizing power. For this group to begin moving forward and to ensure that the recommendations are implemented, authorization of this group is required. Authorizing parties may include tribes, PSP, federal agencies with management responsibilities, existing committees, county interests etc.
- A broad local review group that includes anyone interested or affected by the process.
- A staff person to coordinate process

The next steps in our suggested process would be :

1. Authorization by PSP and County Council to begin process and appoint Steering Committee
2. Steering Committee develops ideas and structures for review
3. Review by broader group
4. Revision of structure by Steering Committee
5. Acceptance by PSP and County Council for implementation.

**Question for Policy Group:** To help the Partnership set up a local entity for implementation of the Action Agenda, what additional factors or issues need to be considered? Do you have changes or additions to the expectations and criteria listed above? Are there other institutional options that should be considered?