

Appendix 3: Summary of Shoreline Owner, Community and Trade Group Research

The San Juan Initiative employed a targeted approach to gather information and encourage a broad discussion with the community about what is working and what is not for protection in the San Juan Islands.

The community was segmented into three research groups: case study neighborhoods, trade groups, and the general public. This allowed us to have targeted discussions based on the expertise of each group. In total, we held 12 workshops – four on each of the three main islands with each of these groups -- resulting in strategic discussions involving over 200 people. In addition, we mailed 450 surveys to the case study shoreline property owners and performed in-depth interviews with 12 property owners. Overall, the workshops were successful in gathering information and were also an effective tool for educating people about the San Juan Initiative. Our general findings are provided below.

Case Study Workshops

The case study neighborhoods were defined as all shoreline property owners on Orcas, San Juan and Lopez Islands within our case study areas. The shoreline property owners were invited to two workshops (April and May) and were sent a survey about their perception of protection problems. A randomly selected group was also interviewed about their motivations for retaining their shoreline in a natural state.

The goals of the first workshop were:

Introducing the Initiative

1. Identifying what property owners perceive as changes in their shoreline
2. Identifying concerns about their shoreline areas
3. Identifying any hopes for their shoreline areas

From this information, we modified our approach to include the concerns voiced by property owners. Specifically, we included in our study impacts from boating on eelgrass and the impact of commercial crabbing on the ecosystem and shoreline property owners. We also included more of an emphasis on strengthening community connections.

The goals of the second workshops were:

4. Presenting findings from the protection assessment
5. Presenting possible focus areas for the solution phase
6. Identifying a sense of priorities for solutions

A detailed summary of this work is below. The neighborhood workshops were well attended with an average of 20 people per workshop for a total attendance at six workshops of 114 people. Some people attended both workshops but some of the workshops had an almost completely new group of people.

Trade Group Workshops

Members of trade groups were invited to one meeting in May on each of the three main islands. An invitation letter was sent to all island-based contractors, landscapers, excavators and builders. Email invitations were sent to Orcas, Lopez and San Juan Realtors as well. The letters also provided some information about the San Juan Initiative. A total of 71 people attended the trade group workshops.

The goals of the trade group workshops were:

1. Introducing the Initiative
2. Identifying protection issues
3. Presenting findings from protection assessment
4. Presenting possible focus areas for the solution phase
5. Identifying a sense of priorities for solutions

General Public Workshops

The general public is probably the most difficult group to reach. We held one meeting on each of the three main islands. The meetings were advertised in the print paper and fliers were distributed on Orcas and San Juan. There was also a long article in the Orcas and Lopez papers the week before the meetings. The general public workshops reached a total of 16 people (Lopez is not included in this count). The goals of the general public workshops were the same as the trade group workshops listed above.

Key points from the community workshops:

- ~Shoreline property owners feel a strong sense of responsibility to steward the shoreline. Owners at our workshops had lived on the shoreline an average of 20 years. This tenure brings with it an enormous understanding about changes on the shoreline and in the community.
- ~Property owners and contractors recognize that many of the changes we see locally are the result of decades of changes. They understand that many of these changes have happened in other communities that now have less healthy ecosystems.
- ~The community is concerned with physical changes to the shoreline but they don't believe their actions are significant compared to other actions that they perceive to have greater effect to both their local marine environment and ecosystem of the San Juans.

- ~Participants are very concerned about crabbing. Their concerns are two-fold: 1. they're concerned about the impact of crabbing on eelgrass beds and 2. they're concerned that over harvesting by commercial crabbers results in few crabs for shoreline property owners and other recreational crabbers.
- ~Impacts from boating and transient moorage on eelgrass beds and enclosed embayments were a concern for shoreline property owners on San Juan Island.
- ~Property owners and contractors want consistent regulatory accountability and enforcement. Participants provided examples from their own experience when lack of enforcement resulted in damage to the shoreline.
- ~Both residents and members of the trade groups want access to technical information on how to protect property from erosion and how to steward the shoreline more effectively.
- ~People are concerned that current storm water management is leading to more damage to the environment rather than less.
- ~Participants recognize that bulkheads and armoring on adjacent property create impacts on nearby landowners, resulting in the need for more armoring of the shoreline.
- ~People did not want the San Juan Initiative to just focus on shoreline property owners when they may not be the most significant cause of problems in the marine environment. They wanted assurance that other issues like commercial crabbing, anchoring of boats in the summer and pollution from Victoria are examined.
- ~Participants expressed frustration with the overlapping, unclear and conflicting government regulations, lack of clear answers on what could be done on their property and the high cost of getting permits. This was not echoed in the survey in which most respondents felt that the information they received from the county was clear.

Unmodified Shoreline Property Interviews:

We were interested in understanding why good stewardship occurs along the shoreline. What are the factors that lead people to retain vegetation, not armor and forgo a dock on their property? To answer these questions, we randomly selected 24 property owners for interviews. The properties were chosen because the structure was at least 125 feet from shore, had retained at least 75% of its vegetation, and did not have a dock or armoring. Unfortunately, we were only able to reach 12 property owners.

Summary of responses:

- ~Our first question asked the property owner about the distance the house is set back from the shore. None of the people interviewed had built their homes. Some had water views and some did not. Even though they were over 100 feet from the shore, most perceived themselves as close to the water. All stated a preference for large trees. Many mentioned the privacy afforded by forested areas.
- ~The second question asked why they had retained so much vegetation. Most have not changed the property from the state it was when they purchased it. Some have had their property for 50 years and still haven't changed it. Universally, they like large trees along water. Some have limbed up the trees to get some view of water. We were interested in understanding if the actions of a neighbor influence a property owner's choice in maintaining a natural state. When asked this question, most did not think their neighbor's property affected their decision to keep their property natural though most went on to say that the neighbors keep their property natural as well. This suggests that they are aware of their neighbors' property and it may be having a small influence.
- ~Most of the respondents have boats ranging from dinghies to sail boats. Many of them cited the expense of docks or the lack of a good location as reasons why they hadn't built one. Many used alternative forms of moorage: buoys, other's docks or boat trailers.
- ~Only one property owner was concerned with erosion. None of them were interested in putting armoring in front of property. Many expressed a dislike for putting rock on the beach.
- ~When asked what additional information they would like for how to steward their property most responded that they did not need additional information. There were two needs identified: how to reduce fire hazard and information on soft shore protection. When asked where they got their information, most said they got information from friends or neighbors. Many identified that they had received mailings from Friends of the San Juans, and six property owners cited it as useful.

Written survey:

A survey was mailed on May 20, 2008 to shoreline property owners in our case study areas. The purpose of the mailing was to include in our study concerns from property owners who were not able to attend the meetings. This survey was mailed to property owners in the Orcas, San Juan and Lopez case study areas.

Surveys mailed: 526
Surveys returned: 34

Synthesis of responses:

What human activities pose the greatest threat to Puget Sound?

- ~Commercial fishing and crabbing were listed 60% of the time as the greatest threat to the marine environment of Puget Sound.
- ~Pollution ranked second as the largest threat to Puget Sound – 38%
- ~Failing septic and oil spills were listed 23% of the time.

What human activities pose the greatest threat to San Juan County water?

- ~Commercial fishing and crabbing were listed almost 50% of the time as one of the top three threats.
- ~Pollution was the next most often listed.
- ~Anchoring in sensitive areas and impacts from recreational boaters was listed in the top three 23% of the time.

Where did respondents get their information about how to steward their property?

- ~Virtually an even split between non-profits, government and neighbors. Respondents listed the Friends of the San Juans and the San Juan Preservation Trust as sources of information.

When asked if property owners were interested in having a dock, armoring to prevent erosion, or clearing to improve views, almost 30% of respondents were interested in armoring to prevent erosion.

When asked if information from the County was clear in dealing with docks, armoring, or vegetation, 57% of respondents felt that the information was clear. About 42% felt it was unclear or moderately clear. Information from the state government was clear about 47% of the time and moderately clear or unclear 26% of the time. Only 19 respondents answered these questions.

The final two questions refined our understanding of property owners' concerns by asking what actions should take place on their piece of property and what actions should be undertaken by the larger community.

The most frequently listed action that property owners thought was important was reducing pollution and chemical runoff from their property. The second most important action was maintaining their septic systems. An equal number felt that the second most important action to take was to leave the shoreline alone and continue doing what they have always done. The next most frequent response was to maintain vegetation.

Maintaining vegetation and leaving the property alone are similar responses; if we combine those responses, then that would be the second most frequent response behind dealing with runoff issues.

The most important issue that should be addressed by the community was better management of fisheries and crabbing with 30% of the votes. The next most frequent response was providing science-based education and technical resources to property owners. And the next most frequent response was repairing failing septic systems.

When asked what programs aimed at protecting shoreline most limited their rights, respondents were tied in their frequency of listing dock regulations, clearing regulations, setback rules and bulkhead/armoring rules. In the same response, many also felt that the rules were adequate and necessary.

Good Steward Interview Questions:

These are the questions we asked during our in-depth interviews with homeowners:

Q1: One of the most important decisions for a homeowner and for the environment is where homes are placed on a site. Your home is at least 125 ft back from the shore. If you built your house, why did you make that decision? If you didn't build your house, how did the location of the house relative to the shoreline affect your purchasing decision?

Q2: You have retained the trees between your house and the shoreline. Why is that? What are the factors you consider when you think about leaving trees in place?

Q3: Has the character of your neighbors' property affected your land use decisions?

Q4: Many people in your area have a dock, but you do not have a dock. Do you have a boat? What factors went into your decision to not have a dock? Have you wanted a dock and been stopped by regulations?

Q5: Many people in your neighborhood have put rock on the beach to protect their property. What are the factors you have considered in not putting in a rock wall? Are you concerned about erosion on your property? Have you thought about putting rock on your shore?

Q6: We have heard from property owners that they would like more information about how to steward their shoreline property. What information would help you continue to be a good steward?

Q7: Where do you get information about stewarding your property? Have you participated in any shoreline education programs like Beachwatchers? Have you

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received information from Friends of the San Juans and was that information useful to you?

Written survey raw answers:

Question 1: What human activities do you think are the greatest threats to the marine environment in Puget Sound? Please list your top three actions.

Commercial or tribal fishing/crabbing	20
Pollution/runoff	13
Oil spill from tankers & other oil pollution	9
Failing Septic & untreated sewage	8
Inappropriate development and clearing of uplands and loss of habitat	6
Whale watching	3
Pollution from boats and wake impacts	3
Industrial shoreline activities	2
Dumping of yard debris	2
Illegal or poorly designed moorings	2
Armoring	1
Not enough protection of rivers/streams	1
Climate change	1
Docks	1
Government regulation	1
Recreational shoreline activities	1
Junk cars/garbage	1
Pollution from Canada	1
Litter on shoreline	1
Derelict boats	1
Overpopulation	1

Question 2: What do you think are the greatest local threats to the marine environment? Please list your top three actions.

Commercial or tribal fishing and crabbing	16
Polluted runoff	9
Anchoring in sensitive areas and boating pollution	8
Failing septic systems	7
Oil spills from tankers and chronic spills from large marinas	6
Habitat destruction and clearing of uplands	5
New armoring and repairs without permitting	3
Whale watching	3
Derelict and illegal mooring buoys	2
Garbage/junk near shoreline	2

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Derelict fishing line and plastics in water	2
Climate change	1
Canadian Geese	1
Ignorance of environment	1
Tourists	1
Docks	1
Seals	1
Logging	1
Low cost housing that attracts more people who cause more problems	1
Untreated sewage from Canada	1
Erosion	1

Question 3: Many property owners know how to steward their shoreline property in a manner that protects the environment. We would like to know what sources of information you rely on.

Neighbors	11
Environmental groups	11
Government	10
Personal experience/background	27

Which environmental groups and government entities?

Friends	5
SJPT	2
DOE	2
WDFW	2
SeaDoc	

Question 4: As a property owner, would you like to?

Build a dock	5
Prevent erosion with armoring	10
Remove trees for view	4
Replace dock	3

Question 5: Please check any of the changes that already exist on your property.

Dock	12
Bulkhead/armoring	9

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Cleared vegetation along shore	3
Stairs	1

Question 6: In your experience, either in planning or undertaking any of these actions, did you receive clear information from the County regarding the rules and requirements for your shoreline activity?

Yes, it was clear	12
It was moderately clear	2
It was confusing	5
I had no contact	3

Question 7: Did you receive clear information from the State and Federal government regarding the rules and requirements for your shoreline activity?

Yes, it was clear	10
It was moderately clear	3
It was confusing	2
I had no contact	3

Question 8: What do you think are the most important actions for you can do to protect the marine environment on your property?

No chemicals / run off issues	13
Don't change what we are doing – our property is good as it is – leave shoreline alone	6
Well maintained septic	6
Maintain vegetation	3
Eradicate Canadian geese	2
Monitor lease agreements	
Remove litter	2
Bulkheads	2
Manage the harvest of tidelands/ shellfish	1
My property is too small to have an impact	1
Too late – damage done	1
Be alert for problems- gather evidence of problem and don't implement solutions until you and your affected neighbors understand potential adverse impacts and intended impacts	
Eliminate crabbing in bays	1
Speak up about observed abuse of shoreline environment	1
Prevent erosion	1

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Leave driftwood	1
Abide by current regulations in existence	1

Question 9: What are the top three actions we could take as a community to improve the health of the marine environment?

Stop over-fishing - manage fisheries	10
Provide science based education – provide assistance to property owners	6
Improve runoff and monitor water quality	5
Repair failing septic systems and reward good systems	5
Educate public about dumping yard debris on beach and debris around shoreline	3
Minimize clearing	2
Punish polluters – stop Canadian sewage	2
Reduce geese population	2
Host shoreline trash pick ups and educate fishermen about derelict gear and prevent storage of junk cars along shore	2
Zero impact on marine environment from SJC - already healthy	2
Remove derelict boats and mooring buoys	2
Eliminate whale watching boats	2
Plant eelgrass	2
Limit overnight boat mooring	1
Monitor new shoreline development	1
Require permits for bulkhead repairs	1
Restrict dock building	1
Keep heavy equipment off beaches	
No more regulations	1
Be alert for problems- gather evidence of problem and don't implement solutions until you and your affected neighbors understand potential adverse impacts and intended impacts to community	1
Eliminate crabbing in our bays	1
Pass local legislation to protect and restore shoreline habitat and work with state legislature	1
Reduce taxes and put that money to shoreline management (sic)	1
Restrict development	1

Question 10: What government programs aimed at protecting the shoreline do you think most limit your rights and interests as a property owner?

No clearing for view	3
Setback rules	3
Protecting against erosion / bulkhead rules	3

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Dock regulations	2
Current level is appropriate and necessary	2
Army Corps	
SMA	
County Planning	
SMA – fine as it is	
Excessive paperwork for repairs	
Too bureaucratic to get approvals	
Having to share docks	
GMA	
Stair design requirements	

Question 11: Are there any other comments you would like to share?

My neighbor's property has drastically changed my beach - I'm concerned with neighbors' actions on shoreline	2
Shoreline requirements seem to be based on aesthetics rather than environmental concerns	
Less regulations and more common sense	
Recognize good stewardship that is designed to help environment such as Spencer's Landing Marina	
If sea levels rise, eelgrass will be the least of our problems	
Government should remove structures that could not be permitted under current regulations – eliminate grandfathering of illegal structures	
Plant more eelgrass	
Certify marinas	
Government should have meetings like these every five years or so to assess values and community needs	
There are too many needless regulations	
Do not change laws about current bulkheads	
Do not case out environmental waterfront owners with threats to their property and values.	
Avoid soil disruption	
Lack of heavy woody debris on shorelines	
Enforce existing laws	