



Dear Property Owners and Citizens of Northeast Lopez Island,

Last month we invited you and your neighbors to a meeting to discuss the health of the marine shoreline on Lopez Island.

The meeting was held on April 24. We had a great showing of committed citizens, and learned a lot about people's concerns. On average, people who attended had lived or owned property in the area for 20 years. A few had lived there over 50 years. This is an amazing wealth of experience and knowledge, and we're glad to be able to include it the San Juan Initiative's efforts to protect the marine environment in the San Juans.

This letter summarizes the important feedback we heard at the meeting and describes the next steps in our work.

We're also inviting you to follow-up meetings on May 28th and June 14th, and we've enclosed a short survey about how your interests and experience. Please take a few moments to fill out the survey after you've read this letter.

We appreciate the time and energy of those who attended:

Property owners: Gene Chao, Marc Zener, Nancy Lynch, Ron Lathan, Carl Bender, Larry Moulton, Margaret Moulton, Maury Dalton, Cynthia Spitze, Al & Mary Ann Torrico, Patricia Goodfellow, Myrna Mattson, Gladys Shipley, Sally & John Moore, Mark Jacobsen, Anchor DeWitt Jensen, Larry McGill, Lena Blais, Duane Bordvick, , Paul Carroll, Larry Snow and Councilmember Bob Myhr.

Members of the San Juan Initiative Policy Group: Jonathan White – Co-Chair San Juan Initiative; Nick Jones; and Tom Cowan.

Jim Johannessen – Coastal Geologic Services, and staff members Amy Windrope and Jim Kramer.

As you recall, the purpose of the meeting was to explain the San Juan Initiative and why we are looking at Shoal and Swift Bay and the northeast shoreline of Lopez as one of four case study areas in the islands. In brief, the San Juan Initiative is the first effort ever by governmental and private organizations to assess whether we are protecting the environment and property rights. The current focus is on the marine shorelines of the San Juans because it is one of the most intact and important areas for all of Puget Sound. There is still a lot to protect in the San Juans due in part to good stewardship by land

owners. Shoal and Swift Bay and the northeast shoreline of Lopez are one of four case study areas because they are representative of the different types of shorelines and human activities in the San Juans.

At the meeting we learned a lot from the attendees about changes in the area, the community and their concerns. This meeting was the start of what we hope is a continuing conversation between landowners, scientists and community leaders to understand how to best protect the environment and support the rights and interests of property owners.

Here is a summary of what we heard:

What is special about the area?

- People enjoy the rural environment and the sea life.
- There is a network of people that creates an important and valued sense of community and communication about the shoreline and the people living there.

Changes to the area

- There are a lot of new and part-time residents who don't always understand what it means to live in a rural and wild environment. Some of the new home owners are removing trees and modifying their property, and may not understand the importance of their actions in protecting the area's character and their neighbors' property.
- There are worries about the loss of eelgrass beds and the effect on crabs and other animals that use this habitat to lay eggs, find shelter and eat. Some people think the commercial crabbers are harming the eelgrass by dragging their pots as they collect crabs. Commercial crabbing also limits the ability of property owners to enjoy the bounty of the marine environment.
- As neighbors bulkhead or armor their bank, it creates impacts on the adjacent landowners creating the need for more armoring of the shoreline.
- In some places development uphill appears to be creating more runoff and affecting shoreline property owners. Sediment is filling in the lagoon adjacent to Swifts Bay.

Concerns

- 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 to the shoreline. They wanted assurance that other issues like commercial crabbing and pollution are examined (we agree these issues need to be addressed and will provide a summary of what we find out).

- People also recognized that their area is part of a much larger ecosystem and their relative contribution needs to be considered. For example, what is their area's contribution to herring population declines in contrast to a place like Cherry Point where oil transfer facilities are built adjacent to one of the most productive herring spawning beaches?
- Many at the meeting 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 to get permits. People wanted the ability to consult with experts on bank erosion and other issues before they get into an expensive governmental process.
- A number of the long time residents thought there needs to be a better way to inform newcomers to the area about the community and how to live in a manner that protects the environment and the rural nature of the community. Several people suggested ways that they could take more responsibility welcoming people into the community and helping them contribute to the health of the shoreline and the responsibilities of being a community member.

What have we done so far?

Over the last couple of months the San Juan Initiative has collected information on the governmental requirements for shoreline armoring, docks and the retention of shoreline trees. These issues are important because they can create a direct impact on the health of eelgrass beds, fish spawning on beaches and the feeding and rearing of young salmon.

In four case study areas (Garrison and Mitchell Bays on San Juan, the eastern half of Stuart, the western portion of West Sound on Orcas, and the northeast portion of Lopez) we have collected information on each shoreline property, specifically to see if there is shoreline armoring, docks and vegetation along the shoreline. We have mapped this information and can show where properties are adjacent to fish spawning beaches and eelgrass beds. In the Lopez Case Study area we found:

- There are 202 shoreline lots along the 8.4 miles of shoreline and about a quarter of the lots are not built on yet.
- Eelgrass covers about four linear miles or half of the case study area. Eelgrass is where herring can spawn and eelgrass beds are one of the most productive parts of the marine environment supporting crabs and many other organisms.
- 75 percent of the shoreline is covered with trees that can provide shade for the forage fish (sand lance and surf smelt) eggs on the beach and provide insects that salmon and other aquatic species eat.

- There are about 3 miles of feeder bluffs that can provide sand and gravel to continually nourish the beaches. However, a third of the feeder bluffs have been armored to prevent property erosion which diminishes the supply of new sand and gravel to beaches in the area.

The information provided by the property owners at the meeting, combined with what we have collected, shows there have been some impacts from development along the shorelines but that much of the shoreline has been left in a natural condition.

The high percent of natural area provides the foundation for many of the attributes valued by the community, such as an abundance of birds, crabs, and other wildlife, as well as the aesthetics of an undeveloped shoreline. Property owners are very supportive of protecting the environment and wanted better information and support from the government to ensure their property is contributing positively to environment health and the environs people so enjoy living in.

Next steps

We will research the questions raised at the meeting regarding pollution and commercial crabbing. We will also continue to look at the overlapping regulations and try to determine where they could be improved to support the needs of property owners and protect the environment.

The input from property owners that attended the meeting is invaluable and we would like to continue the discussion. We are scheduling a meeting with property owners along Shoal and Swift Bays and northeast Lopez on May 28th from 6:30-8:30 at Islanders Resort and Marina. We hope you can come. Another meeting will be held with any interested members of the public on June 14th from 10-12am at Islanders Resort and Marina. Your participation in both meetings would be greatly appreciated. Please let us know by returning the attached survey. We invite you to send comments or call us with feedback in response to this letter.

We have also included a survey that would help us understand better your needs, concerns and hopes as a shoreline property owner.

Please contact us if you need more information (Amy Windrope, amy.windrope@psp.wa.gov, 360-298-2278; Jim Kramer, jkramer.consulting@gmail.com, 206 841-2145). You can also visit our website at www.sanjuaninitiative.org.

Sincerely,



Jim Kramer, Project Manager