



Dear Property Owners and Citizens of the eastern shore of West Sound,

Last month we invited you and your neighbors to a meeting to discuss the health of the marine shoreline in West Sound.

The meeting was held on April 17. 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 in 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 29th and June 7th, 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: Sara Jane Johnson, Ed and Carol Joneschild, Mary Schoen, Joan and Wayne Haslett, Bob and Sandy Vietzke, Lance Joyner, Warren Miller, Betsy W., Scott, Roger Sherman, Larry McNair, Wally Gudgell, Michael Durland, Bob Eagan, Jeff Otis, Jennifer Johnson Fralick, Council Member Alan Lichter

Members of the San Juan Initiative Policy Group: Jonathan White – Co-Chair San Juan Initiative; Lisa Byers, OPAL Community Land Trust; Patty Miller, CAO Review Committee,

Joe Gaydos, SeaDoc Society and member of the Initiative Science Committee; 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 West Sound 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. Because of good stewardship by land owners there is still a lot to protect in the San Juans. West Sound is one of four case study areas because it is representative of the different types of shorelines and human activities in the San Juans.

At the meeting we learned a lot about changes in West Sound, the community and your 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 and wild nature of the area
- There is a network of people that creates an important and valued sense of community. These people communicate about what is happening and how it affects the area and the people living there.

Changes to the area

- Many people think West Sound is cleaner now than it was years ago when there were industrial activities. This improvement is in part the result of changes in practices at marinas and boatyards. The water quality of West Sound has also improved due to property owners building and maintaining septic systems.
- Residents notice there are fewer sea birds, crabs and fish. People speculated that the increasing number of seals, geese, and recreational boaters in the summer could be a primary cause and did not sense that changes to their or surrounding properties were the cause.
- Boat wakes are changing beach composition and could be affecting shoreline health.
- As neighbors bulkhead or armor their banks, it creates impacts on the adjacent landowners creating the need for more armoring of the shoreline.
- Several stated that the commercial harvest of crabs is affecting their ability to enjoy the bounty of the marine environment.

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. They wanted assurance that other issues like population increase, anchoring of boats in the summer, ocean harvest and seal populations would be considered. (We agree these issues need to be addressed and will provide a summary of what we find).
- Property owners want a more sophisticated dialogue about what is really happening in their area, and the range of causes/solutions. They want to make sure that your actions will make a difference.
- 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 what is required of shoreline property owners.
- Many at the meeting were looking for information about what lives on their shoreline so that they could be better stewards. People are looking for more detailed and useful information than what is available.
- There was concern about the rate of development in neighboring Deer Harbor and the impact that the road has on West Sound's health.

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 West Sound we found:

- There are 128 shoreline lots along the 9 miles of shoreline in the study area and about a third of the lots are not built on yet.
- Eelgrass covers 3 linear miles and fronts about a 40% of the parcels. Eelgrass beds are where herring can spawn and 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 forage fish (sand lance and surf smelt) eggs on the beach and provide insects that salmon and other aquatic species eat.
- There remains a half mile of unarmored feeder bluffs that can provide sand and gravel to continually nourish the beaches. However, over a half mile has 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 shoreline 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 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 the geese population, recreational boating, and commercial harvesting. 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.

Next Neighborhood Meeting: West Sound Community Club, May 29th from 6:30-8:30

Meeting for any interested members of the public on June 7, 4-6 pm, Orcas Senior Center

Your participation at both meetings would be greatly appreciated. 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