



Dear Property Owners and Citizens of Mitchell and Garrison Bays,

Last month we invited you and your neighbors to a meeting to discuss the health of the marine shoreline in Mitchell and Garrison Bays.

The meeting was held on April 15th in Roche Harbor. 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 30 years. A few had lived there over 50 years. This is an amazing wealth of experience and knowledge. We're glad to be able to include it the San Juan Initiative's efforts to protect the marine environment and support property owner interests 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 27th and June 7th, and we've enclosed a short survey about your experiences in managing shoreline property. 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: Dale Snyder, Richard Snyder, Mike Cohen, Gary & Patricia Vannest, Dave Simonson, Jack Corey, Judson Shorett, Diane Adams, Dick Shorett, Meri Ann Simonson, Tim Gambrell, Paul Lingane, Mike Chadwick, Bill Bailey, Joyce & Tory Johnson, Jack Raub, Brian McGlynn, Howie Rosenfeld- County Council, Rich Peterson –County Council

Members of the San Juan Initiative Policy Group: Jonathan White – Co-Chair San Juan Initiative; Ron Zee – Soil Conservation District; Kit Rawson – Marine Resources Committee Chair; Jeri Ahrenius – boatyard and marina owner.

Members of the Initiative Science Committee: Tina Whitman – Friends of the San Juans; Andrea McLennan – 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 Mitchell and Garrison Bays as one of four case study areas on 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. Garrison and Mitchell Bays 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 about changes in the two bays, 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 bays. For example, being able to see the stars on clear nights and enjoy the quiet and natural surroundings are important to people in your neighborhood.
- There is a network of people that creates an important and valued sense of community and communication about what is happening that affects the bays and the people living there.

Changes to the area

- Many people think the bays are cleaner than they were 15 to 20 years ago because there is no longer any significant discharge of human waste into the bays. The water quality of the bays was improved by property owners voluntarily building and maintaining septic systems.
- 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. One example given was that it is hard to get enough volunteers for the fire department even though there are more homes now than 15 years ago. Many 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. People speculated that the increasing number of geese and the recreational boaters in the summer could be a primary cause and did not sense that changes to their or surrounding properties were the cause. They also wondered if aquaculture operations were creating problems. (We are discussing these issues with scientists studying the loss of eelgrass and will report back to you on their views.)
- As neighbors bulkhead or armor their bank, it creates impacts on the adjacent landowners creating the need for more armoring of the shoreline.

- Commercial crabbing is occurring again and limits the ability of property owners to enjoy the bounty of the bays.

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 bays. They wanted assurance that other issues like commercial crabbing, anchoring of boats in the summer and aquaculture are examined. (We agree these issues also need to be addressed and will provide a summary of what we find out.)
- 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 bays 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, 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 Garrison and Mitchell Bays we found:

- There are 203 shoreline lots along the 9 miles of shoreline in the two bays and about a third of the lots are not built on yet.
- Eelgrass covers about two and half linear miles and fronts about a third of the parcels. 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 is a half mile of feeder bluffs that can provide sand and gravels to continually nourish the beaches. However, half 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 the geese population, aquaculture, recreational boating, 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 the property owners that attended the meeting is invaluable and we would like to continue the discussion. We have scheduled meetings with property owners in Mitchell and Garrison bays on May 27th from 6:30-8:30 at Roche Harbor Resort. We hope you can come. Another meeting will be held with any interested members of the public on June 7, from 10-12 at the Friday Harbor Grange. Your participation in both meetings would be greatly appreciated. Please let us know by returning the attached survey. We have 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, Program Manager

