

**San Juan Initiative  
Policy Group**

**Meeting Summary - Approved  
6.20.08  
San Juan Island Grange**

Policy Group in attendance:

Jeri Ahrenius	Nick Jones	Peter Dederich
Jonathan White	Lisa Byers	Bob Fritzen – DOE
Sam Buck	Kit Rawson	Fayette Krause
Patty Miller	Danna Kinsey	
Stephanie Buffum Field	Kevin Ranker	

Staff:

Amy Windrope  
Jim Kramer  
Jim Johannessen, CGS

Public:

Jim Slocomb  
Jack Cory  
Debby Clausen

Documents Discussed in Meeting:

Assessment of Ecosystem Protection – What’s Working and What’s Not – A Preliminary Report, June 16, 2008

**Decisions:**

- Draft Meeting Summary for March 26<sup>th</sup> was approved without changes.
- The Policy Group is encouraged to submit edits to the Preliminary Report by Thursday June 26<sup>th</sup>.
- Staff will develop an additional document that outlines the process of the protection assessment.
- Staff will scope a terrestrial protection assessment as part of final phase.
- Staff was directed to create a proposal that focuses on better management of forest cover and shoreline armoring through development of technical assistance, clear and efficient regulatory processes, incentives, and compliance.

**Summary of Discussion:**

**Which findings from the Assessment of Ecosystem Protection did the Policy Group find most significant?**

- Policy Group members were struck by the lack of accountability at the local level and the low level of compliance with permit conditions. Many Policy Group

members stated how duplication within the system--coupled with the lack of accountability--has the unintended consequence of encouraging people to "game the system." Many members mentioned that unclear & conflicting regulations and the lack of technical assistance leave landowners not knowing how to do the right thing. The Policy Group felt that the amount of undocumented shoreline armoring and the amount of shoreline armoring on sensitive habitats like feeder bluffs and forage fish beaches were significant. The fact that San Juan County is unique in its biodiversity needs to be better highlighted in the report. The Policy Group was struck by the high variability of shoreline vegetation and the lack of good regulations or incentives to retain it. There was also a sense that the San Juan Initiative had an opportunity to be a positive force for change based on the work done so far and the presence of the right people at the table. The raw comments gathered at the meeting are at the end of this document in Appendix A.

**Through discussion, the Policy Group developed some core principles for choosing where to focus:**

- Gain public support for ecosystem protection.
- In order to reduce the impacts of shoreline structures, we need to provide trade groups, local government staff, and property owners with more education and better access to information about regulatory requirements, current science, and the status of the ecosystem.
- Accountability is a core issue for improving protection, and it affects all other activities.
- We need to develop better incentives, education, and compliance mechanisms to improve fairness and accountability.
- While addressing negative activities is important, the San Juan Initiative could lead a sea change for resource protection by focusing on current positive actions and finding ways to increase them.
- Build linkages across the opportunities and develop solutions that address a few specific areas holistically. For example, focus on bulkheads or vegetation to improve accountability, technical assistance and reduce duplication. Those improvements will then inform and change the way we protect other important habitats.

### **Staff Proposal for Phase 3 – Solutions**

Based on the core principles developed by the Policy Group and the preliminary vote on which opportunities to focus on, staff recommends combining the top four opportunities (see page 4 and 5) for improving protection and focusing them on two activities: shoreline erosion control/armoring and retention of forest cover.

In this proposal, the San Juan Initiative staff would work with the responsible agencies, trade group representatives, property owners, scientists and other members of the public to improve the overall system for ecosystem protection. Specifically, staff would design a system of connected programs across governments and nonprofit organizations that:

- Provide technical assistance and relevant science to property owners, trade professionals and agency staff so that people can make better decisions.
- Reduce duplication in the permit review process for shoreline vegetation and shoreline armoring by increasing clarity in the regulations and streamlining administrative practices.
- Develop a community-supported system for inspections and compliance.
- Provide incentives for owners of smaller properties to retain vegetation and control erosion with lower impact solutions.
- Provide incentives and information to trade professionals to more effectively reduce environmental impacts and address property owner's interests.

In addition to this focus on shoreline vegetation and erosion, staff would also support agencies or organizations working on the other nine opportunities for improving protection. Additionally, if staff determines that certain opportunities are not addressed either by other organizations or by the SJI directly, then staff would develop recommendations for how these other opportunities could be addressed in the future. Staff would also work with interested organizations to define a scope of work and budget to assess the terrestrial environment in the San Juans.

## **Appendix A:**

**Which opportunities for improvement were most important for Policy Group and why?** Raw unedited comments are below listed in order of votes received. Policy Group members were each given 3 sticky notes and asked to place them under the opportunities for improvement they felt were most significant.

#11: Design compliance systems with penalties:

Received 11 votes. It was stated, strongly, that rules without enforcement don't work. The Policy Group also sees an opportunity to inform a process that is beginning between CDPD and the Prosecuting Attorney's office to improve compliance mechanisms. It was felt that property owners and trade professionals are not held accountable for actions and that we have no business creating new rules until we enforce what we have.

#1: Improve Support to Property Owners

Received 8 votes, and Policy Group members specifically focused on improving technical support for property owners, improving access to science information about current status, and creating incentives for people who own smaller properties. Item E, modifying past conservation easements, was explicitly not chosen by Policy Group.

#6: Reduce multi-agency duplication in permit process and free up resources for more sophisticated technical assistance to property owners.

Received 7 votes. High potential for improving protection and could substantively improve the process of permitting. There is a public perception problem that could be resolved by investing resources on this topic. Resolving the duplication could also improve accountability within the agencies and result in a higher level of service. It was also discussed that each agency has a different strength that they could focus on which would improve the overall approach to regulatory permitting practices. The San Juan Initiative has the right people at the table to have this discussion and make some improvements.

#3: Encourage the retention of shoreline vegetation.

Received 6 votes. Members of the Policy Group have had personal experience with the lack of clarity for retaining shoreline vegetation. It is an important issue in the update of the Critical Areas Ordinance and the Policy Group felt that there are opportunities to create flexibility within the system that have not been explored. Policy Group members were struck by the high variability of shoreline vegetation in case study areas and felt that the current system is broken and that it is likely that the current system is resulting in impacts to ecosystem.

#12: Address the need to consider cumulative impacts at the local and regional scale.

Received 4 votes (two from Kevin). Focusing here would allow us to change the parcel by parcel approach and address large scale issues within the ecosystem.

#10: Provide education for trade professionals and create incentives for increased expertise.

Received two votes. Policy Group felt strongly that we can't increase enforcement without a commensurate increase in technical assistance and education to trade groups. Although this received only two votes, the Policy Group felt that trade group education should be folded into #1 (increasing support to property owners).

#8: Develop shoreline reach approaches to protection of resources and control or erosion that brings together incentives and regulatory tools.

Received two votes.

#2: Address landowners' interests in boat access while protecting key ecosystem processes and functions.

Received one vote. In discussion, the Policy Group felt that we could do this through focusing on improving technical assistance to property owners and that the SJI may have more impact by focusing on a broader suite of issues.

#4: Address the impacts of transient boat anchoring and boating on embayments.

Received one vote. This is a significant issue for Garrison Bay.

#9: Improve regulatory programs for stormwater to make more sense to landowners & trade professions and improve environmental protection.

Received one vote.

#5: Explore ways to clearly identify environmental impacts from crab harvest.

No votes. There is hope within Policy Group that this could be addressed through the Marine Resources Committee or by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

#7: Address the lack of specificity within County codes and update the WDFW administrative code with the science already in use.

No votes. Policy Group hopes that the update of the Critical Areas Ordinance will resolve these issues.