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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

My name is Blair Smith. I live within the Blaine city limits and I have been a resident of Whatcom County for over 30 years.

I strongly support City of Blaine Resolution 1765-19, concerning the creation of a no shooting zone in Drayton Harbor for a number of reasons:

1) Urban Growth Area

I understand that this area had been very rural and a hunting ground for many years. Apparently the County and the City of Blaine participated in the creation of urban growth areas surrounding Drayton Harbor and since then we have had a steady increase in both housing density and population in these areas.

I suppose that with so many people moving into and urbanizing the areas surrounding Drayton Harbor, it was inevitable that conflict would eventually occur between homeowners wanting to enjoy the peace and repose of their private property and others wanting to hunt on adjacent public land.

I doubt that anybody sitting up there on the dais, here in the audience, or watching at home can say that they would enjoy being awakened by the sound of gunfire at the crack of dawn for weeks on end from October to January, but that is how it is for us living out there. My wife and I walk the Semiahmoo Spit several days per week and it is so unpleasant that she does not even want to go down there during hunting season. It negatively impacts our quality of life.

2) Tourism/Visitors

As you know, we are fortunate to have a world class resort on the Semiahmoo Spit as a neighbor. This business, which employs a lot of local people and presumably pays a great deal of taxes, markets itself around the birdwatching opportunities of Drayton Harbor and the spit, and according to their website, apparently conducts its own birdwatching tours on Saturdays. There is a "Wings Over The Water" birding festival in the spring and it is considered one of the premier coastal birding sites in Washington. The area brings in even more people to enjoy the natural beauty of the area and its wildlife. We also have a county park that draws local residents to do the same.

Again, can anyone sitting up on the dais, in the audience, or watching at home not see the disconnect and incompatibility of drawing tourists and local residents to an area to experience the wonder and beauty of nature with having people hunting in that same space?

3) Pollution

My wife and I often clean the beaches of garbage left behind or washed up on the shore. For weeks during and after hunting season I find spent plastic shotgun shells washing up on both sides of the Semiahmoo Spit. I often wonder how many we don't see that sink to the bottom and eventually break down and contaminate shellfish, fish, mammals, and eventually all of us.

4) Public Safety

Is this a safe activity to conduct around large groups of people living, recreating on nearby boats and kayaks, and walking and biking along the paths and trails? Some will say it is, but I don't see a great deal of enforcement out there and I don't trust 100% of any group or persons to follow the laws and rules all of the time. Will everyone use the right ammo and stay far enough away from shore? We had an incident last year where one of the hunting boats was very close to the shore of the west side of the spit, maybe 100 yards off at most, on a Saturday morning. I could hear them talking quite clearly on their boat and yelled at them to move further out, but again, nobody is around or able to do anything. Having hunters with guns beside lots of people in an urban environment is a recipe for disaster and in my opinion subjects the county/city taxpayers to unnecessary liability.

Conclusion

Like it or not, this once rural area was put on a path to change decades ago and is now much more urban. This should not be framed as a hunting versus anti-hunting issue. I have nothing against hunting personally, having in fact hunted birds in my youth, and believe that hunting can be an important part of wildlife conservation. My concern is that hunting is conducted responsibly, legally, and in appropriate locations with respect for everyone and everything living nearby (which it currently is not).

I don't envy any of you sitting up there tonight. In this zero sum society of ours, it seems that somebody has to "win" and somebody has to "lose." I am not sure if there is any kind of compromise to be reached, but if there is, I hope you can find it. If not, I would hope that you would not allow one group wanting to use public lands in a way that ruins the quality of life, economics, and potentially public safety for a much larger group of people. When one group or person's idea of freedom infringes upon another group or person's quality of life/freedoms, that is no longer freedom, that is tyranny.

Thank you all for your service.

Respectfully submitted October 8, 2019