

5 424



2309 Meridian Street
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 733-8307 • re-sources.org

To: Whatcom County Council
311 Grand Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98225
Transmitted Via Email to: council@co.whatcom.wa.us

September 9, 2019

RE: Addition to the proposed draft Whatcom SMP Scoping Document

Dear Honorable Council Members,

Thank you for your attention on the scope of the Whatcom County Shoreline Master Program Periodic Update for 2020.

RE Sources for Sustainable Communities is a local organization in northwest Washington, founded in 1982. RE Sources works to build sustainable communities and protect the health of northwest Washington's people and ecosystems through the application of science, education, advocacy, and action. Our North Sound Baykeeper program is dedicated to protecting and enhancing the marine and nearshore habitats of northern Puget Sound and the Georgia Strait. Our chief focus is on preventing pollution from entering the North Sound and Strait, while helping our local citizenry better understand the complex connections between prosperity, society, environmental health, and individual wellbeing. Our North Sound Baykeeper is the 43rd member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, with over 300 organizations in 34 countries around the world that promote fishable, swimmable, drinkable water. RE Sources has over 20,000 members in Whatcom, Skagit, and San Juan counties, and we submit these comments on their behalf.

Overwater structures, including docks, cause direct and indirect impacts to shoreline functions and habitat for salmon and forage fish like Cherry Point herring during the construction process and over the useful life of the dock. The cumulative impacts of overwater structures are:

- "Increase in pollutants and habitat disturbance associated with boat operations and dock and piling maintenance",
- "Increased travel distance and time for juvenile salmon and extended time in deeper water, increasing predation risk",
- "Decrease in eelgrass and plant habitat and overall photosynthesis in intertidal zone",
- "Alteration in juvenile salmon prey base and predation pressure", and



- “Change in wave energy and longshore drift patterns, and resulting changes in upper intertidal sediment distribution”¹

Our current Shoreline Master Program (SMP) does not attempt to encourage other uses like mooring buoys, strictly regulate the size, or require in the permitting process to obtain denial letters from adjacent neighbors with docks requesting to share access. This is a huge oversight and one of the reasons we should be exploring whether our SMP is meeting the state mandated no-net-loss of shoreline and ecological functions.

Other counties have taken steps to better regulate the proliferation of docks on our shorelines, such as King County², due to population growth and increased pressure on their shorelines. Whatcom County must be prepared now for the future growth and strain on our shorelines. This will save us money in the long-run as mitigation and restoration needs will decrease and impacts to habitat are avoided or minimized.

In the proposed Whatcom County SMP Scoping Document dated August 28, 2019, **please add either a new section or add onto Topic #11 Overwater Structures:**

- Add a clear preference for the use of mooring buoys.
- Applicants must demonstrate conclusively that use of a moorage buoy, nearby marina, public boat ramp, or other existing shared facility is not possible. This includes providing evidence of contact with abutting property owners and evidence that they are not willing to share an existing dock or develop a shared moorage. For commercial/industrial facilities, this would include evidence that existing commercial facilities can't be shared or are inadequate for the proposed use.
- Minimum grating requirements to allow for light.
- Any dock, pier, and moorage pile must include an evaluation of the nearshore environment and the potential impact of the facility on the environment.

Please support the addition of the above elements to better protect or minimize the impacts of docks on shorelines and move forward with a no-net-loss evaluation on shoreline and ecological functions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Karlee Deatherage
Policy Analyst, Clean Water Program

¹EnviroVision, Herrera Environmental, and Aquatic Habitat Guidelines Program, “Protecting Nearshore Habitat and Functions in Puget Sound”, June 2010, P. 70. [attached]

² King County Code, 21A.25.180 “Dock, pier, moorage pile or buoy, float or launching facility”, <https://aqua.kingcounty.gov/council/clerk/code/24-30 Title 21A.htm# Toc397073377>,