

The Northern Light

Blaine and Birch Bay's Community Newspaper



City seeks to establish no shooting zone in Drayton Harbor

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By Jami Makan

The city of Blaine is seeking the creation of a no shooting zone in Drayton Harbor, in order to address residents' concerns about gunfire near homes and property.

Waterfowl hunting in Drayton Harbor has been on city council's radar for several years. The exact dates of waterfowl season are set by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and vary from year to year. The season typically starts in late October and runs through late January. During the season, hunters on boats shoot at sea ducks using birdshot, which can be heard as early as sunrise by those who live near the harbor.

The Blaine Police Department receives inquiries every year about the issue. "Every year we receive maybe half a dozen inquiries," said Blaine police sergeant Michael Munden. "They are usually asking whether it's legal for people to be shooting in Drayton Harbor. People also want to know how close to the shore [the hunters] can be."

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Although portions of Drayton Harbor are within city limits, other portions are within Whatcom County jurisdiction. Whereas it is legal to discharge firearms in unincorporated Whatcom County, it is illegal to do so in the city limits of Blaine, where hunting is prohibited.

"Our city limits are drawn in a peculiar way out in the harbor," said Munden. "We are left with our oddly drawn city limits map. You can't shoot inside of city limits, but if hunters are in the county, it's a different story."

Whereas waterfowl hunting is currently permitted in the county's portion of Drayton Harbor, the city of Blaine now plans to lobby Whatcom County Council to create a no shooting zone for "all unincorporated portions of Drayton Harbor aquatic area, tidelands and shoreline." The county council has authority to do this pursuant to section 9.32 of the Whatcom County Code.

"The Blaine City Council has expressed concern with the fact that members of the public are unhappy about the discharge of firearms near the city," read a request for council action prepared by city manager Michael Jones for the July 8 council meeting. "Since housing density is increasing around Drayton Harbor, the concerns of discharging firearms in a residential area will only increase."

Based on council direction, Jones recently developed a resolution to seek designation of all the aquatic areas and tidelands within Drayton Harbor located within Whatcom County as a no shooting zone. The resolution passed unanimously at the July 8 council meeting, and Jones now plans to bring it to Whatcom County Council for their consideration.

The resolution notes that "it is difficult for members of the public to distinguish between incorporated and unincorporated areas particularly on the open water, which causes numerous hunters to inadvertently move into areas where hunting and discharge of firearms is illegal."

State game warden Dave Jones appeared to disagree with this characterization. "In my 12 years of enforcing here, I've never had to address someone who is inside the city limits," he said. He said he understands why a new resident to the area, who is unfamiliar with hunting, might have concerns about noise and safety. But he said the hunters are a "good crowd" who generally abide by the rules. Often, they are accompanied by professional guides. "No one's in danger of anything whatsoever, but there's some noise," he said. "That's just a reality."

Waterfowl hunters agreed that there is no danger to residents of Drayton Harbor. "There is no danger to any homeowners in the area as long as hunters are following the rules already in place," said Matt Berry, Whatcom County treasurer of the Washington Waterfowl Association (WWA). "The effective range of a shotgun is much less than the distance hunters must maintain from homes. Hunting is an

important part of many Whatcom County residents' lives and heritage and we are losing opportunities at an accelerated pace. It is a shame that the city council would actively lobby against their interests because of a few complaints."



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