



Lake Whatcom Policy Group

May 14, 2018 Meeting

Brief Digest of Presentations and Discussion

Policy Group members in attendance: Todd Donovan (Whatcom County Council); Michael Lilliquist (Bellingham City Council); Larry Brown (Sudden Valley).

1. 2018 watershed resident survey – overview of intent and process

A survey of all watershed households will be administered this year to assess the knowledge and activities of residents. The results of the survey will be available by the end of 2018. This survey will be repeated every 5 years to see how attitudes, activities, and knowledge among watershed residents changes over time. The City of Bellingham is lead for this project, and has contracted with Applied Research NW to develop and administer it. Meeting watershed challenges requires actions by both governments and the 16,000 residents whose daily activities affect the Lake. Governments install stormwater facilities, purchase land, provide education, and regulate land use. Actions by residents also have a major impact on the lake. How people deal with pets, clean their cars, or care for their yards can all impact water quality. The survey is a good tool to understand what beneficial activities residents are engaged in, and also what they are not doing. For example, if most residents are already taking their car to a carwash the Lake Whatcom program would not likely focus on that when conducting outreach. On the other hand, surveys indicate that people are using fertilizer with phosphorus, this would become a focus for education.

Some surveys were completed in the past on various aspects of stewardship and attitudes of residents, but this survey will be repeated over time so that the Lake Whatcom program can track whether outreach efforts are making a difference, and to learn how efforts need to be refocused. The City held focus groups with stakeholders and identified a number of possible questions that the consultant is winnowing down. These will be reviewed again by stakeholders before use. We will also track a set of behaviors that affect the watershed over time. Some examples of questions include: how do people repair car fluid leaks; are they replacing lawns with native landscaping; do they report spills; are they using authorized access points for boating, etc. The survey is scheduled to go out in September, with final results available by the end of December. The results will influence the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation plan, as well as the Lake Whatcom program work plan.

2. Update on County stormwater utility finance plan

The County Council created a County stormwater utility district in December 2017. The County will engage a consultant to come up with a fee structure and rate schedule this year. A public meeting was held in April of this year to kick off the process. The next step is to form an advisory committee to help the consultant and staff identify what will be funded through the district, how much money will be collected, and who pays what. The County just appointed an advisory group and is planning the first meeting, likely to be held in June. The County Council will appoint one of its members as a non-voting representative. There will be about 6 monthly meetings. In the fall there will be another public meeting to present the findings of the advisory group and the consultant. The County Council will consider a fee and rate structure in the Fall. This will need to be

presented to the County Treasurer by November to get it added to the tax collection system by 2019. The public can comment on the work of the advisory committee at any time, comments will be posted on the Lake Whatcom Management Program web site, and all meetings will be open to the public. The rate structure and any possible exemptions will be examined. Impervious surface is the usual method employed by such a district, but there may be ways to more directly measures phosphorus contribution from a property. This will be a fee not a tax, although there could be senior exemptions, and perhaps discounts for people who are doing things to reduce phosphorus.

3. Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program: Start of season update

Boat inspections started on April 21 and the season is already very busy. There is a crew of 16 working at 4 different check stations. Before the start of season, program staff went through 10 days of classroom training as well as hands-on practice on how to inspect and clean boats. Thus far, 766 motorized permits have been sold, along with more than 1000 non-motorized permits, and 20 day passes. Revenues to date are about \$35,000, mostly from annual permits for motorized craft. About 1000 inspections occurred at Bloedel Donovan, 79 at the Sudden Valley launch, 360 at Lake Samish, and 49 at the South Bay launch. There have also been some group inspections for neighborhood boaters. For example, over 60 boats were inspected in the Geneva Neighborhood. The Bloedel Donovan and Lake Samish inspection stations are open 7 days a week, and the Sudden Valley and South Bay launches are open only on weekends. The program has received positive feedback from boaters.

This past weekend was Nooksack Days for tribal canoe racing at Bloedel Donovan. Over 90 tribal canoes from more than 20 different groups were inspected. One week before that was the Lake Whatcom Classic with over 100 non-motorized boats in attendance. There have also been bass fishing events at Lake Terrell, and the boats are inspected for milfoil when they leave that lake. Lake Terrell was treated to reduce milfoil last year and staff are monitoring to see if its condition has improved. At Camp Lutherwood on Lake Samish a number of rowing events have been held, and boats were inspected and education provided to young rowers on the need to maintain clean and dry boats to maintain drinking water quality.

Only a few states do not have infestations including Washington, Idaho, and Oregon. Wakeboard boats with standing water are higher risk. Canoes are often dry because they are being transported upside down. There have been some concerns about whether the Sheriff's office has been enforcing the rules and possible miscommunications indicating that the program was only a City and not a County program, which is inaccurate. Staff have not had a chance to determine if this information is accurate. There was an effort to get emphasis patrols a few years back but it didn't work with the Sheriff's staff schedules.

4. Short-term rentals update

Last year the County Council reviewed zoning code and shoreline master program amendments and adopted a framework for performance standards for vacation rentals. These would be allowed in most areas of the County, and in the Lake Whatcom watershed would be allowed with a conditional use permit. The framework for an ordinance was approved to be forwarded to the state Department of Ecology (DoE) for review as part of an update of the County's shoreline management program. This year DoE issued an approval after minor revisions. Ordinances will come back to the County Council for consideration later this summer. The conditional use process would place

some restrictions on the number of people who can stay in a short term rental, and indicate how long they can stay. A registry of units would be created for monitoring and enforcement purposes. Some residents have expressed concerns that short term vacation rentals will overload septic systems in the County. Enforcement of the rules has been a problem. The County Council will discuss these issues when the topic returns to Council.

For Bellingham, the City Planning Commission just made a recommendation on a draft short term rental ordinance after 5 work sessions and a public hearing. These would be allowed in most of the City but with stricter regulations in residential areas, and they would be prohibited in the watershed. A City Council public hearing on short term rental regulations will occur on June 18. Currently, if people want to have a short term rental they must go through a conditional use process to establish a Bed and Breakfast. There are very few of these that have been permitted -- about 8. However, citywide there are probably about 300 short term rentals, indicating that these rentals are proliferating without being approved by the City.

5. Review of proposed topics for July 16 Lake Whatcom Policy Group meeting

Proposed Topics for July 16:

- County stormwater district funding update
- Review of 2018 stormwater capital projects
- Tributary and lake monitoring update

For future meetings (2018):

- Update on recreational developments at County Parks and Lookout mountain: parking, trail use, and facilities developments.

Upcoming Meetings:

2018 Lake Whatcom Policy Group meetings will occur on Monday July 16; Monday Sept. 17; and Monday October 29, at 3:00 PM in the Fireplace Room, 625 Halleck Street.