



## Lake Whatcom Policy Group

### February 8, 2023 Meeting

### Brief Digest of Presentations and Discussion

**Policy Group members in attendance:** Hannah Stone, Skip Williams (Bellingham City Council); Kaylee Galloway, Todd Donovan (Whatcom County Council); Bruce Ford, Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District; Nancy Alyanak (Sudden Valley Community Association).

#### **1. Purpose of the Policy Group and Joint Councils and Commission meetings, and options for improvement.**

The Lake Whatcom Policy Group was started in 2008 by members of the Bellingham City Council, the Whatcom County Council, and the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District Board. The Policy Group is part of the Lake Whatcom Management Program. Although Sudden Valley is not part of the management program, a representative from the Sudden Valley Community Association board was added in 2014, reflecting Sudden Valley's impact on the lake.

At its inception the group was intended to improve dialogue between the legislative members of the jurisdictions and to solidify staff cooperation regarding the lake. Since then the jurisdictions have developed a wide range of cooperative activities and there is good communication among partners. Over the years the number of meetings has trended downward after the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) was accepted by the Department of Ecology and the jurisdictions made needed budget commitments to meet the TMDL requirements by 2050. Staff are routinely implementing the management plan and there is less need for policy development.

Some topics are primarily generated and processed at the respective legislative bodies. In some cases, the same topics may be brought as updates to the Policy Group. A new practice would include inviting a member of the city's Watershed Advisory Board (WAB) to report to the Policy Group on their activities, or County staff could repeat the presentations given to the water work sessions so that the other jurisdictions could be informed of County activities. Reports could also note changes made by other jurisdictions. For example, the County Council recently directed staff to look into the regulation of vacation homes.

Policy Group members discussed areas of interest for topics with policy relevance that may be discussed during 2023. These include:

- Presentation of a report from USGS of sediment sampling in the Lake, with attention to forestry impacts and possible impacts from the Nooksack diversion.
- Report on stormwater systems and their performance.

- Focus on forestry, particularly the workings of the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan and whether it is doing its job, and the operation of the Interjurisdictional Committee that reviews forest practices.
- Funding for land acquisition, and whether the County should develop its own funding source for acquisition.
- Report on the specifics of climate planning within the Lake Whatcom program.
- Wildfire management.
- Mountain bikes and their impacts in the watershed including parks/trails.

More broadly, there could be a need for a public engagement function, such as Town Halls or presentations on various lake-related programs.

The annual Joint Council and Commission meeting is part of the Lake Whatcom Management Program interlocal agreement and provides an opportunity for policy makers to get key updates from staff, and for the public to be informed on the activities to help the lake. There is an annual update from the Institute for Watershed Studies at Western on the water quality of the lake pursuant to the TMDL. Every 5 years at the annual meeting the 5 year Lake Whatcom management work plan is approved by members of the legislative bodies, along with the updates and planned activities in the 10 program areas. Policy Group members called out topics such as forestry, recreation management, and phosphorus reduction as of particular interest for discussion at the upcoming annual meeting.

Policy Group members requested that staff set aside more time for response to staff and for discussion among the legislative bodies at the annual meeting. A focus on the activities of the legislative bodies as a whole instead of the activities of individual members would be most appropriate.

## **2. Discuss Joint Councils and Commission Annual Meeting Agenda**

The Annual Joint Councils and Commission Meeting is set for March 29, 2023. Policy Group members called for more time for discussion to be built into the agenda. An agenda topic will be added for response and discussion by the legislative bodies after the staff presentation of the annual report. Public comment will be limited to 2 minutes per participant and a sign-up sheet for comments will be available before the meeting.