



## Lake Whatcom Policy Group

### February 7, 2024 Meeting

### Brief Digest of Presentations and Discussion

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

#### 1. Introduction to Lake Whatcom Management Program 2025-2029 Work Plan

Whatcom County staff gave an overview of the 2025-2029 Work Plan development process. The proposed timeline is as follows:

- Today- Introduction, process discussion, and summary of program areas
- Spring- Internal coordination and homework (gather input from councils and commission)
- June Policy Group- Proposed outline, policymaker input, and hold question & answer
- Summer- Develop draft plan, public comment, and coordinate with Ecology as work plan goes into the requirements of the TMDL
- September Policy Group- Final draft and summary of public input
- Winter- Councils and Commission adoption and final plan

There are ten Program Areas in the current Work Plan:

1. Land Preservation- City's acquisition program, Galbraith Mountain easement, and county's reconveyance lands. Also includes land management and wildfire preparedness.
2. Stormwater- Capital stormwater, maintenance, residential projects, research, and TMDL response.
3. Land Use- City and county regulations for development in the watershed, Sudden Valley Stormwater Management Plan, and city/county staff tracking Forest Practices Applications.
4. Monitoring & Data- City's contracts for lake and tributary monitoring, data team, and partnership with Ecology for TMDL compliance.
5. Hazardous Materials- Focus on preventing and responding to spills.
6. Recreation- Management of over 9,500 acres of recreation lands in watershed, trail management, and educating visitors.
7. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)- City manages with contract through county and Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District (LWWSD). Includes inspections, AIS awareness course, permit fees, and decontamination of high-risk watercraft.
8. Utilities and Transportation- Water and sewer managed by city and LWWSD, streets and roads managed by city and county, and on-site septic system compliance managed by county.
9. Education& Engagement- General basin-wide education, program area-specific education, county-wide and city-wide education.
10. Administration- overall administration for the programs, budgets and coordination between partner entities. Holding meetings, preparing reports, and ensuring regulatory

requirements are met.

Climate action has been identified as an additional component in the next work plan. This will address responding to climate change (drier summers, more intense rains in fall, winter, and spring, warmer water for bacteria and AIS). Efforts will be guided by existing city and county climate action plans, with the intention to add climate actions by program area.

Other new, improved, or enhanced actions identified for the next work plan include:

- Whatcom County Forest Management Plan
- Phosphorus and Bacteria Optimized Operations and Maintenance Assessment
- TMDL assistance mini-grants for HIP successor program
- TMDL data gaps research
- Lake Whatcom Vulnerability Assessment
- AIS Rapid Response Plan

City and county staff will incorporate input from the Policy Group and public. Gary Stoyka is the lead for getting input from County Council, starting at the February 13<sup>th</sup> Water Works Session. Renee LaCroix is the lead for City Council and Justin Clary is the lead for LWWS Commission. Policy Group members showed support for holding an additional Policy Group meeting before June.

The Joint Councils and Commission meeting is scheduled for March 27<sup>th</sup>. Staff will give an update there on the work plan development, but there won't be time for discussion.

Policy Group members inquired about the relationship between the Lake Whatcom work plan and the County Comprehensive Plan. Cliff Strong from Whatcom County Planning and Development Services will send the current County Comprehensive Plan draft to the Policy Group for general goals and input.

## **2. TMDL Reassessment Update**

Whatcom County staff gave an update on the TMDL reassessment. Whatcom County staff reviewed the draft reassessment report and received comments from stakeholders. The finished draft will be sent to Ecology to review, and it is expected that it might not be ready by the Joint Councils and Commission meeting in March. Staff will have a better idea on timeline by the March meeting.

Department of Ecology staff explained Ecology's role in the process. The county does the reassessment and goes through a stakeholder process, then submits to Ecology's environmental assessment group. The TMDL and waste load allocations may change, and Ecology decides when or if to send for public comment.

### 3. Updates

#### **Forest Practices Application (FPA) Review Process**

Whatcom County staff explained their review process for Forest Practices Applications (FPAs). Staff are signed up for the Forest Practices Application Review System (FPARS), through which they receive notice for all FPAs in Whatcom County. County staff look at those in Birch Bay, Drayton Harbor, Lake Samish, Lake Whatcom, and Lake Padden watersheds, then send a review comment letter to Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). In general, the letter requests that Department of Ecology wetland and stream buffers are respected and to not harvest trees in winter.

City staff explained that City staff and their consultant review Forest Practice Applications for proposed private and DNR -cuts. The review process includes field visits with the property owner and DNR staff. Written comments are provided to DNR. DNR may or may not include suggestions from comments when issuing a FPA approval. DNR owned lands in Lake Whatcom are subject additional rules under the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan to protect water quality. DNR also notifies County Parks of FPAs on land adjacent to parks.

There is one harvest coming up on private land owned by Bloedel in the Lake Whatcom watershed. As it is private land, it is not subject to the rules of the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan. The Landscape Plan only applies to DNR land. There are usually five FPAs per year in the Lake Whatcom watershed, with usually only one on DNR land and the others being on private timberland.

#### **Proposed Amendment to Whatcom County Code to Exempt Trail Building in the Lake Whatcom Overlay District**

The City Mayor sent a letter to County Council to recommend not making changes to Whatcom County Code that would exempt trail building. In light of that, Whatcom County Planning and Development Services has scheduled a County Council Committee of the Whole meeting on February 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss.

### 4. Topics for Next Policy Group Meeting

- LWMP Work Plan Follow-up in extra Policy Group meeting before June, maybe in April. Staff to discuss at ICT next Thursday.
- TMDL Reassessment Presentation in June
- Comments on the Comprehensive Plan
- Parks Update on Forest Management Plan (if consultant is hired)

The next Policy Group meeting will be April 24<sup>th</sup> at 3:00PM. The following Policy Group meeting is scheduled for June 5, 2024 at 3:00PM.