



Lake Whatcom Policy Group

December 20, 2024 Meeting

Brief Digest of Presentations and Discussion

Policy Group members in attendance: Hannah Stone, Skip Williams (Bellingham City Council); Todd Donovan, Kaylee Galloway (Whatcom County Council); Jeff Knakal (Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District); Keith McLean (Sudden Valley Community Association).

1. AIS Risk Based Fee Structure

City staff provided an overview of the current Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) permit fees based on cost of service and risk models. The AIS program is a risk management program, meaning it focuses on finding ways to reduce the threat of introduction of AIS to Lake Whatcom. The risk to Lake Whatcom has changed, largely due to quagga mussels having been detected in the Snake River in Idaho. Idaho treated the river but still had larvae detected in 2024, which they are continuing to treat. If the invasive quagga or zebra mussels were to establish in Washington State, it is estimated it would cost \$100 million annually to keep Washington's power and water infrastructure running. The proposed new fee structure is meant to better reflect cost of service and risk, in addition to updating prices due to inflation while still keeping permit fees affordable. The permit fees have not been raised or updated since 2019.

Program revenue includes permit fees, cost sharing agreements with Whatcom County and Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer Districts, and City. The fee structure is intended to keep fees affordable to encourage and incentivize boaters to comply with the program in recognition that higher fees may drive boaters to find alternate launching points. The current AIS fee structure has three vessel classes: non-motorized, small vessel, and registered vessel.

Current annual permits are as follows:

- Non-motorized- \$10/year- For non-motorized vessels under 16 ft. They are easy to inspect as there are not many places for AIS to attach.
- Small vessel- \$30/year- For vessels with a motor under 10 horsepower and are also under 16 ft. These are relatively easy to inspect.
- Registered- \$60/year- For vessels with a motor over 10 horsepower or are over 16 ft long. These can have multiple ballast tanks and can travel faster, so have a higher risk. It can take over 30 minutes to inspect. When a registered vessel comes from a high-risk area, inspectors will check state data to see if the vessel was decontaminated when crossing state lines. Lead staff will complete such inspections and will pump hot water through ballast tanks, since those cannot be visually inspected. AIS inspectors have always provided decontaminations for free so people don't avoid that service.

The proposed AIS fee structure considers vessel complexity as well as vessel origin. In addition to the three vessel classes, there are three proposed risk tiers: Tier 1 - within Whatcom County, Tier 2 - within Washington State (outside of Whatcom County), and Tier 3 - out-of-state. The highest risk and thus highest fee is for out-of-state and the lowest fee is for within Whatcom County.

The revised permit fees will be as follows:

Annual Permit Fee

Vessel Origin Tier	Registered Vessel (Class A)	Small Vessel (Class B)	Non-motorized (Class C)
Tier 1	\$80	\$40	\$10
Tier 2	\$100	\$60	\$10
Tier 3	\$150	\$100	\$10

In 2024, gross sales from permits totaled approximately \$190,190. With the proposed fee structure, gross sales are estimated to be \$291,545 in 2025.

The City is also looking at installing gates at Bloedel Donovan when AIS inspectors are not present. Boaters looking to launch would be able to contact AIS staff for an inspection, which could sometimes be done by phone and the gates opened electronically. The boat launch at Sudden Valley also has a gate. City staff have not talked to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife about installing a gate at South Bay. There are approximately 8 private launches on lake.

The City's Parks Department also intends to charge a trailer parking fee in 2025.

Policy group members stated interest in increasing the out-of-state fee more to deter out-of-state boats, but also need to consider increasing fees too much that boaters avoid inspection stations. There was also mention of working with the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office to increase enforcement and increase fines.

A change to the City's AIS fee structure will also require a change to Whatcom County's Unified Fee Structure. Staff will also check County code to see if a code revision is necessary.

2. 2025-2029 LWMP Work Plan

Overview of Work Plan Development

City staff provided an overview of the 2025-2029 Lake Whatcom Management Program (LWMP) Work Plan development. The plan was created by 20-30 staff members from the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, and Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District. After the public comment process, staff made changes to the work plan based on input received.

The five-year work plan is a coordinated effort and provides a broad overview to guide the three jurisdictions' work, while allowing flexibility to adapt. Annual progress reports contain specific details, such as phosphorus-reduction estimates.

The work plan development process began in spring of 2024 with direction from leadership to drafting an outline. A draft plan was released in summer of 2024, where it was shared with the Policy Group and opened for public comment. At the September Policy Group meeting, staff summarized the public comments received. Staff reviewed public comments, made edits to the work plan, and provided responses to comments in a table. The plan was presented to the City of Bellingham's Water Resources Advisory Board, where it received the board's support through a 6-3 vote. The revised draft and

public comment responses were also shared online on the LWMP website and the City's Engage Bellingham work plan webpage.

The following are examples of changes made to the work plan after the public comment period:

- Changed to 12 goals, with objectives tied to each goal. Matched reporting metrics to objectives.
- Applied SMART (strategic, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) goals framework where able.
- Added hyperlinks to resources and plans with more information.
- Rewrote introduction to explain the purpose of the plan.
- Added mention of state and federal agencies and provided links to more information.
- Added adaptive management section.
- Added land preservation reporting metric to track outreach to landowners.
- Changed recreation goal to be consistent with watershed health and land management goals.
- Added boating as a new objective in the Recreation program area.
- Added reporting metric to track sewer overflows in the watershed.
- Added other minor text edits throughout to improve readability.

Staff clarified the proposed work plan does not exceed staff capacity, even with the addition of the Climate Action and Forest Management program areas.

Feedback on Work Plan

Policy group members had some refinements to the work plan:

- Update the numbering in the Climate Action section.
- Link the Landscape Plan in the relevant resources of the Forest Management Section.
- Add metrics to define a successful objective. This could be detailed in the progress reports.
- Include the presentation slides from today's meeting on the LWMP and Engage Bellingham webpages as a way to explain this process to the public.

Sudden Valley Community Association (SVCA) is interested in a forest management plan for Sudden Valley, but lacks funding. County Parks and SVCA should discuss, as the County Parks Forest Management Plan will include Lookout Mountain, which is nearby. SVCA has a lot of public greenspace. They also wish to educate private landowners about forest management.

A couple members of the public proposed the following:

- Reporting metrics should be percentage, not count.
- Plan needs to mention educating people about phosphorus in fertilizer.
- Build-out report should occur every year, not five. Staff responded that the build-out is a tremendous amount of work for City staff. There also are minimal changes per year and not enough to make policy changes.
- Incorporate control of and education around English ivy.
- Change regulations to address illegal tree removal, such as requiring a registry for tree service providers.

	<p>Next Steps</p> <p>Staff and policy group members discuss the next steps to finalize the work plan and have the councils and commission adopt it in early 2025. Each council and commission will meet individually in January to discuss with their staff. Then the Policy Group will meet in February to discuss and incorporate any input received from the individual councils and commission. The group discussed the options to have each council adopt the plan. Options discussed included approving the work plan at the annual JCC or taking it to each council and commission individually.</p> <p>Policy group members suggested holding a discussion at the first Policy Group meeting of 2025 to discuss what is the Policy Group's role in implementing the plan. Also develop a plan to tackle the policy questions.</p>
3. LWPG Meeting Dates 2025	
	<p>The Policy Group decided to schedule meetings every other month in 2025. Staff will look to schedule for the first Wednesday of the month in the afternoon. The Joint Councils and Commission meeting will likely be scheduled for the last week in March.</p>

Next Policy Group meeting date: February 5, 2025 at 3:00 PM