



# You and Your MRA

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 Supplement to the *Septics Edition* newsletter for properties in the MRA

## The “Marine Recovery Area,” Septics, and Shellfish

Marine Recovery Areas (MRAs) are established to focus attention on and protect especially sensitive marine waters from pollution from poorly functioning or failing septic systems. A 2006 Washington state law required Puget Sound counties to designate MRAs where shellfish growing areas are closed due to bacterial pollution (or if closure is likely), or where bacteria or nitrogen are seriously affecting water quality.

### Why was an MRA formed?

The MRA in eastern Clallam County was established because parts of Dungeness Bay are currently closed for commercial and recreational shellfish gathering, and there are bacterial pollution problems in some of the streams that empty into the Bay and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Human waste, most likely from poorly functioning or failing septic systems, is contributing to these problems according to recent research that identified bacterial sources. The Sequim-Dungeness Clean Water District was created by Clallam County in 2001 partly to address issues such as insufficient monitoring of septic systems. Because of this link the MRA coincides with the Clean Water District.

### Where is it exactly?

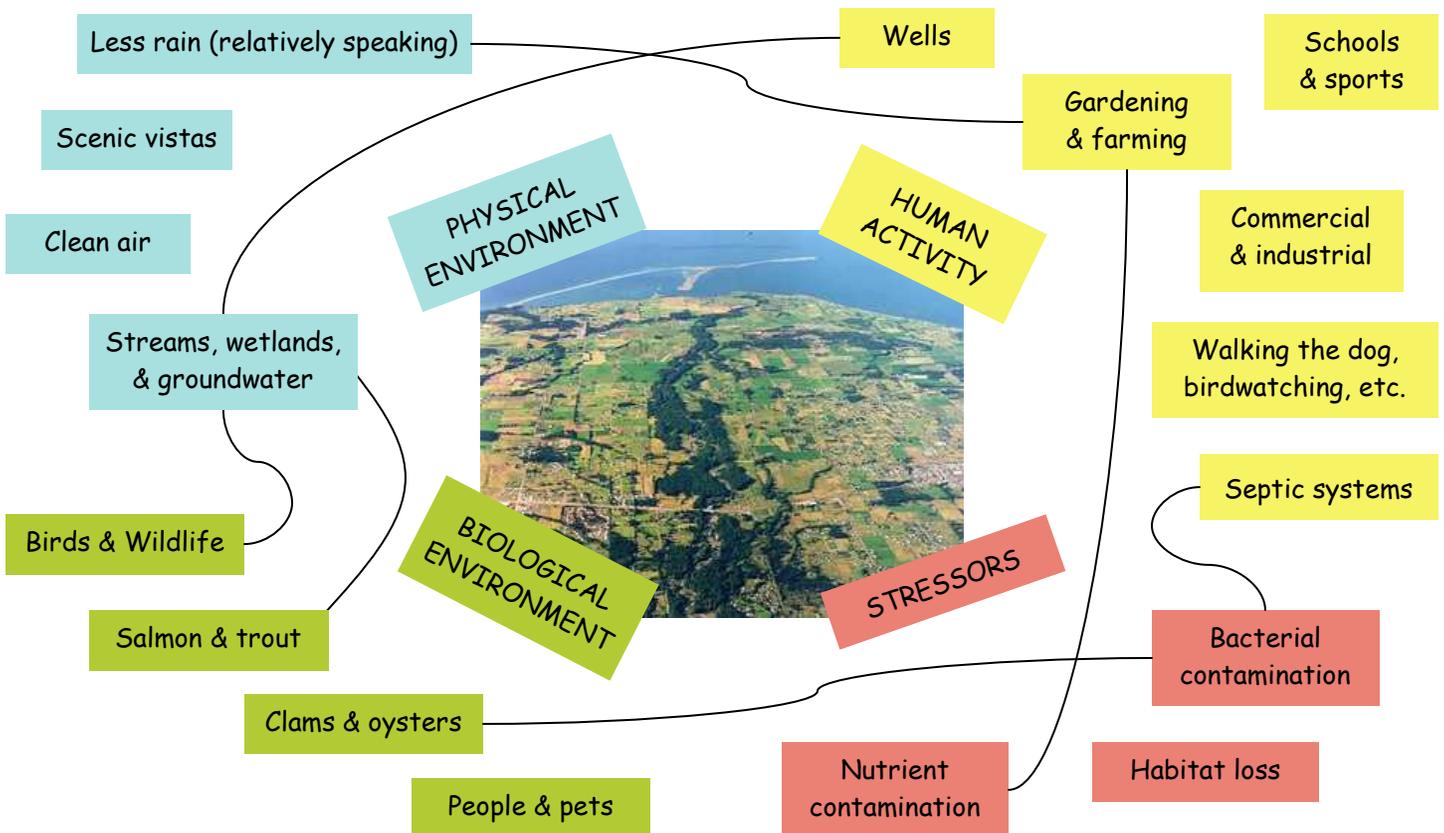
The MRA encompasses the Dungeness watershed, those waters influenced by it through the irrigation system, and nearby independent tributaries to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. It extends from Bagley Creek east to and including the Sequim Bay watershed and Miller Peninsula, and from the Strait south to the county line.

### How does living in the MRA affect me?

Septic system owners in the MRA must have a recent inspection performed by a licensed professional. After the initial inspection, homeowners who have received do-it-yourself training (when it becomes available in the future) will be allowed to inspect their own system if they so choose. The Spring 2011 issue of the *“Clean Water Herald: Septics Edition”* describes the basic elements of a professional inspection; an article on the back describes what to know before harvesting shellfish.

### What does my septic system have to do with harvesting clams in Dungeness Bay?

Just as many of our day-to-day activities are inspired by the natural attractions of this beautiful area, our actions sometimes affect water or air quality, wildlife habitat, or other natural amenities. This illustration shows a few of the linkages between typical aspects of life in the MRA. ***A link could go in either direction, or both—add your own!***



### Clallam County Onsite Septics Program & Other Water Quality Webpages

- Onsite septic systems in general: <http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite.html>
- “Septics Edition” newsletters: <http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/ehnewsletter1.html>
- Surface & groundwater quality reports: <http://www.clallam.net/environment/index.htm>



## Lower Dungeness Watershed

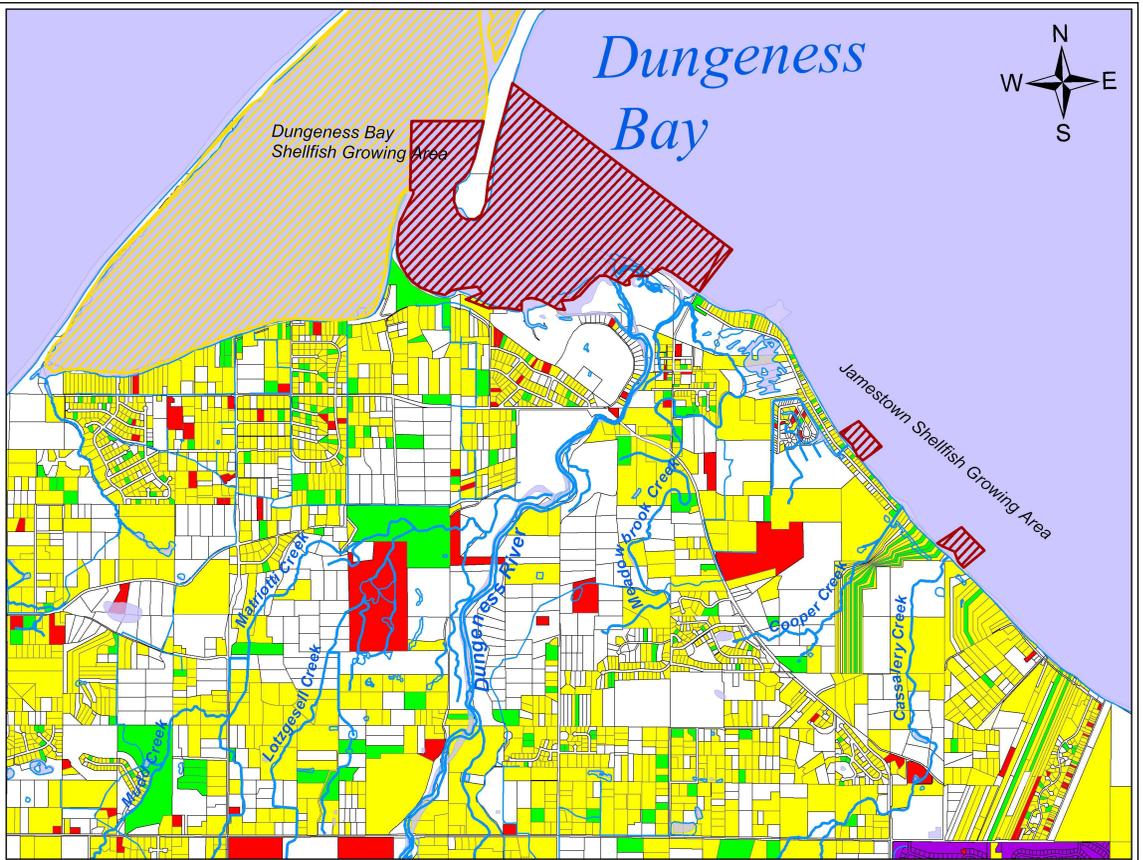
### Septic System Status

- No Septic System Record and No Recent Inspection
- Septic System Record but No Current Inspection
- Septic System Record and a Current Inspection
- On Sewer
- Vacant or Open Space: Unlikely to generate sewage

### Commercial Shellfish Growing Areas

- Conditional
- Prohibited

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles



**WANTED:  
A FEW  
HUNDRED  
GOOD  
SEPTIC  
RECORDS**

This is a story of “lost” septic systems and how Clallam County is trying to find them (and why we need your help).

Washington State septic system regulations require all counties to maintain an inventory of all septic systems, including operation and maintenance activities. The County must also prioritize septic system management in the Marine Recovery Area (MRA, see other side), and in particular must:

- √ Maintain an electronic database of all septic systems in the MRA; and
- √ Identify developed parcels without a septic permit or other septic record on file and ensure the system is inspected and functioning properly, or repaired if needed.

The best way for the County to do this is to track septic system permits. Since 1968, all septic system installations and repairs in Clallam County require a permit from the Environmental Health Division (EH). The County began using an electronic database for permit information in 1987. When EH processes a septic permit, a record in the County’s permit database is created. Permits issued prior to 1987 are older than the database and, until recently, existed only on paper in County files. EH has now completed a special project to find paper septic permits that were absent from our database. We found quite a few – over 7,000 countywide!

EH also now tracks septic system “status” in the permit database relative to an installation, a maintenance inspection, and whether the system is functioning properly. Every developed parcel in Clallam County that is not on sewer (as far as we know...) has a space in the database for septic operation and maintenance (O&M) inspection records. If a parcel has a residence or business but is not hooked up to a sewer system, we assume the wastewater is going to an onsite septic system even if we don’t have a septic permit on file for the system.

To help track septic system status we’ve connected the permit database to the County geographic information

system (GIS) so we can map system status in the MRA and countywide. We can color-code individual parcels to show the status (see map legend for details). Septic systems that we don’t have any records for are considered “unknown,” and are colored **red** on the map. We estimate there are over 400 “lost” systems just in the MRA, and we need to find them! This is where you can help.

As mentioned above, we have narrowed down the list significantly here at the office, and soon it will be time to take our maps and hit the open road. We have already contacted some homeowners who live near the shoreline in the MRA, asking if they know the location of their septic system or have any records or drawings that show the septic tank or drainfield. If no one was home, we left our contact information at the door.

Later this year, we will shift our focus to a high-priority area in the lower Dungeness River watershed (the area shown on map above) where bacterial pollution affects water quality in streams, ditches, the Dungeness River, and shellfish growing areas in Dungeness Bay. There are about 70 developed properties in this specific area for which we don’t have enough information to determine system status.

If you receive a letter from us, or find a flier on your door, please get in touch with EH using the contact information listed. If you have records or other information about your septic system, please share them with us. The purpose of our letters and visits is to exchange information and convert the **red** parcels on our septic system status map to **yellow**, and eventually to **green**!

It is the responsibility of every septic system owner to have their system inspected on a regular basis. Remember, in the MRA the first inspection must be performed by a licensed septic system designer or maintenance provider. Refer to the Spring 2011 “*Septics Edition*” newsletter for details on what an inspection entails. Thank you for your continued help in protecting the health of our community and our environment!



Clallam EH efforts to locate “unknown” septic systems are possible thanks to grant funding from Washington Dept. of Ecology’s Centennial Clean Water Fund.

