

FINAL

CLALLAM COUNTY SHORELINES IN TRANSITION

A Vision Statement for the Clallam County
Shoreline Master Program Update

Prepared for
Clallam County

August 2, 2011



Introduction

Over 35 years ago, Clallam County adopted a Shoreline Master Program to address the three main goals of the Washington State Shoreline Management Act: 1) protect the natural environment along shorelines; 2) provide public access to public shorelines; and 3) preserve opportunities for water-related uses, including commercial uses. In 2011, the County is preparing several documents to update the Clallam County Shoreline Master Program, including this Vision Statement and an Inventory and Characterization Report about the rivers and shorelines of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, goals and policies for shoreline development, and revised shoreline regulations.

The Vision Statement reflects the shared history of local residents and their ideas and goals about how to accommodate change in the future. The communities and shorelines of Clallam County along the Strait of Juan de Fuca are described in three regions: the west end, central strait, and eastern Clallam County. Each of these regions has unique communities and ecological features that may be considered in the update of the Shoreline Master Program. Tribal community perspectives about shoreline use are also summarized, based on interviews with tribal staff and elected officials. Finally, the Vision Statement talks about Clallam County shorelines in the future, as a gauge for designing policies and regulations that will provide the future that the community wants. More information about the Shoreline Master Program update process is located at the end of this document.



Photo courtesy of Dungeness River Audubon Center (Bob Boekelheide)

A Shared History of Shoreline Use

Clallam County's shorelines have a rich history as they have evolved with changes in climate and the human communities that use them. The fishing camp at Hoko was used by Makah ancestors approximately 2,500 years ago, and the recently excavated S'Klallam village of Tse-Whit-Zen, at the base of Ediz Hook, revealed evidence of 2,000 years of continual use. The oldest confirmation of human activity comes from a spear point found in a 14,000-year-old mastodon rib near Sequim—demonstrating that the wildlife communities have been through some changes too.

The first European tourist in Clallam County may have been Juan de Fuca in 1592, but he had only a brief encounter with the Makah Tribe before heading back to Spain to assert his discoveries. Two hundred years later the mapping expedition of Captain George Vancouver in 1792 ushered in two centuries of rapid change to Clallam County's residents and shorelines. Settlers established towns in Port Angeles, Sequim, Dungeness, Blyn, Crescent, and Forks. Mills and canneries were built on the shorelines to process the seemingly limitless supply of timber and fish. Clallam County's economy, based on natural resources, thrived during much of the 20th century—in large part due to the harbors, rivers, and beaches that provided ideal places for processing and transportation.



Photo courtesy of Clallam County Historical Society

The 20th century is now over, and Clallam County shorelines are still in continual transition. Local residents may debate about which provisions of the Shoreline Master Program have worked well and which haven't, but there is little disagreement that the County is headed for higher population levels and more demand for shoreline access and development.

Input for the Shoreline Master Program update was gathered in focus group meetings in January, 2011 and regional public forums in April, 2011. People in the focus groups were asked about the unique features of Clallam County shorelines that they value, what has been getting better, and what has been getting worse. The April forums discussed three issues of particular interest—marine shoreline development, flood plains, and emerging issues related to public access.

The West End

People and Communities: The west end of Clallam County still reflects many of the characteristics of the Olympic Peninsula from decades past—predominately undeveloped shorelines, small isolated population centers, strong economic ties to natural resources, and a sense of self-reliance and independence among residents. Timber harvest remains the top private economic activity and many residents actively stand up for the continuation of the working forest land base to support future logging families. Famous for fishing, Clallam Bay/Sekiou is still a prime launch site for anglers seeking salmon and halibut, and the region is popular with kayakers, hikers, and birders. The western Strait of Juan de Fuca region is also the historical and present-day home of the Makah Tribe, or People of the Cape. Neah Bay is the harbor for the Makah fishing fleet and the location of the commercial district for the community.

The residents of the west end experience frequent power outages during stormy winter months—increasing their strong sense of isolation and self-sufficiency. Many residents at public forums indicated that their families had lived along west end shorelines for multiple generations, and they have seen first-hand what happens along floodplains and marine bluffs when construction activities occur for roads, buildings, bridges and clearing.



Sekiou Three Sisters rock formation from the Bert Kellogg collection of the North Olympic Library System

Ecosystem Characteristics and Important Functions: The west end region covers the shorelines and rivers from Cape Flattery to Deep Creek, including the Hoko, Clallam, Sekiou, Sail, and Pysht Rivers, along with the communities of Neah Bay, Clallam Bay, and Sekiou. Along the Strait of Juan de Fuca are a mix of unstable bluffs and rocky shores. There are few structures to interrupt the movement of sediment along the shoreline except for an occasional breakwater or pier. The underwater kelp “forests” of the strait offer habitat for fish and marine mammal species. Uplands of the west end contain extensive continuous stands of private and state-owned timberland along both marine and freshwater shorelines. Development along the strait, though sparse, is generally concentrated along river mouths and protected bays, which are frequently located within tsunami hazard zones or in or near floodplains. Ecosystem function in most of the west end is good relative to other parts of Clallam County and Puget Sound, and most

management strategies relate to protection of these functions via forest practices and development regulations.

Key issues identified in focus groups and forums for the Shoreline Master Program update in the west end sub-region included the following:

“People should be able to protect their property.” “People should be able to build on their property if they know the risk, as long as it doesn’t affect their neighbors or alter the flow of nature.”

The west end is less developed than eastern parts of the county and many residents want to maintain the opportunity for people to develop or maintain their property. Where development already exists, it was frequently stated that people should be able to protect their property as long as they don’t present additional risk to neighbors in terms of flood hazard or erosion. Where property has not been developed, many people commented that there should be regulations to avoid the need for taxpayers to “bail out” risky development in the future.

“Prospective landowners should be making an informed choice.”

Many residents stated that landowners need to know what they are getting into when they develop along river or marine shorelines. West end residents have a lot of experience with the drastic changes that nature can bring. Newcomers may lack a historical perspective on local conditions, and the inaccessibility of accurate information hampers responsible development. For example, flood plain maps are unavailable, outdated and/or inaccurate; residents would also like to see more air photos showing changes over time to help new landowners understand what risks they are facing.

“The Shoreline Master Program should be set up to assist people rather than telling them what they can’t do.”

Many people expressed the desire to incorporate both flexibility and clarity into the Shoreline Master Program process. Several people stated that shoreline development requirements should be tied to the level of risk (such as erosion or landslide risks) and scale of development. Small repairs and upgrades should not go through the same level of review as large developments. There was a lot of concern about the cost of permitting and assessment and the complications created by layers of regulation.

“Restoration projects are great, but they need to be monitored to make sure they are achieving results and not harming downstream properties.”

People generally expressed support for habitat restoration projects in west end rivers and elsewhere in Clallam County, but they are concerned that funding for monitoring has been cut. There is a strong sense that environmental protection requirements and restoration projects are expensive, and little is being done to determine whether they are meeting the environmental objectives. There is also some concern that restoration projects themselves, such as placement of large woody debris into streams, may have downstream impacts and residents look for assurance that projects are properly designed and permitted.

“We used to allow public access across the timberlands, but people mistreated the opportunity – trash, old appliances, engines being dumped, tree cutting, and crack labs. It’s too much of a mess and too much financial liability.”

Huge areas of private timberland and shoreline parcels were once open for public recreational access to hunt and fish or to get to little-known beach spots, but landowners have found it necessary to restrict access in the face of increased and sometime unwanted use. Limited access through timberland is still provided through controlled permits, but many long-term residents regret that such restrictions have become necessary.

“Clallam Bay is filling in with sediment and we are losing access from the water to the boat launches. Something needs to be done.”

Sediment loading and transport in the Clallam Bay/Sekiou area has been altered by upland changes in the Clallam River watershed, two breakwaters, and shoreline armor (such as rip rap) along one-third of the bay. Sekiou/Clallam Bay business owners expressed concern about changes to the sediment loading into the bay, the hazards for navigation, and the loss of access between docks and water. Several participants in the west end recognized that a positive partnership between the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, WDFW and Clallam County has resulted in action to keep the mouth of the Clallam River open to migrating fish.

“The Olympic Peninsula was famous for fishing, but opportunities to go fishing have become scarce.” “We’ve been hit with economic impacts from the loss of the outdoor experience on the Peninsula.”

The west end still has many old signs for salmon fishing resorts, tackle shops and ocean charters that speak of a once-thriving salmon fishing industry, but like the runs of salmon themselves, the signs have become tattered and scarce. Sport fishermen, commercial fishermen, and tribes indicated a common interest in returning to salmon fishing levels that helped support their communities. Salmon fishing was an integral part of the Olympic Peninsula culture—both tribal and non-tribal, and provided a unique lifestyle experience that many residents refuse to give up on.



Sekiou: Seattle Times photo

The Central Strait

People and Communities: Like the tribal villages that once dotted the central Strait of Juan de Fuca shoreline, many small communities are located near the mouths of the rivers feeding into the strait or within protected bays and harbors. Port Angeles, the largest city in Clallam County (population 19,000), is located inside of Ediz Hook because of the safe harbor created by this natural sand formation. Outside of Port Angeles, small clusters of a few to a dozen houses are located at the mouth of the Lyre, Twin Rivers, and Crescent Beach. Lake Sutherland, which is ringed almost completely by houses and docks, forms another unique community. Some of the homes along the strait and Lake Sutherland have been summer residences for multiple generations. Long term landowners describe their annual visits as kids, returning as retirees to live next to their old summer buddies.

Ancestors of the Klallam tribes resisted governmental efforts to relocate them in the 1860s, choosing to remain near their traditional rivers and village sites on Clallam County shorelines. Eventually, tribal land was purchased in the Elwha River floodplain in the 1930s which was eventually declared to be the Lower Elwha Klallam Reservation. The unfortunate location in the floodplain necessitated a levee to protect many reservation homes and facilities, and continues to make tribal land development difficult.



Left: Elwha Dam construction, 1911-1913 courtesy of the Bert Kellogg Collection of the North Olympic Library System.
Right: mouth of the Elwha River from nps.gov

Ecosystem Characteristics and Important Functions: Looming over the central strait sub-region are the Elwha dams, constructed in 1911 and 1926. Scheduled for removal from 2011-2014, the dams' demolition creates tremendous uncertainty for the human and biological communities near the Elwha River. There is substantial hope that the massive project will achieve the desired environmental outcomes for salmon restoration, but people are very concerned about the effects on their property and the local ecosystem. Community residents and scientists alike speak of the need to react quickly to changing conditions on the Elwha River and nearshore areas in the next few years.

Other rivers along the central strait include the Lyre, Twins, Salt Creek and Morse Creek. Restoration plans for salmon describe the need to remove barriers that prevent the movement of river channels within the floodplain and meander area so that habitat will form in the future.

Closely related to the removal of the Elwha dams is the movement of sediment along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Sediment transport regions, known as “drift cells,” are an essential ecosystem function in maintaining beaches and sand spits. Erosion of bluffs and sediment coming from rivers are natural processes, but the movement can be greatly accelerated or blocked by man-made structures and activities. Pipelines, bulkheads, piers, and the dams themselves all affect the loading and movement of sediment along the strait shorelines, with consequences to property and habitat that are potentially significant, wide ranging, and sometimes difficult to predict. Ediz Hook, for example, was formed by natural sediment movement, but the loss of sediment to feed it created rapid erosion and necessitated rip-rap along its entire length to prevent wash outs. The movement of sediment also replenishes beaches throughout the central strait and eastern Clallam County. These beaches are used as spawning grounds for forage fish--surf smelt, sand lance, and herring that are eaten by other fish, marine mammals, and birds up the different levels of the food web.

Key issues identified in focus groups and forums for the Shoreline Master Program update in the central strait sub-region included the following:

“We support dam removal, but we are very concerned about our property.”

Landowners along the Elwha expressed worry about potential changes resulting from dam removal, and are interested in how the Shoreline Master Program will affect existing or potential levee structures or erosion remediation projects.

“We need better enforcement, especially for vegetation removal.”

Clallam County citizens at all of the public forums frequently expressed support for consistent enforcement related to clearing, setbacks, and tree removal. They pointed out that lack of enforcement is a poor incentive to adjacent landowners to abide by the rules. This desire was linked to the need for clear regulations so that landowners will know what they can and can't do.

“Existing homes and properties should be treated differently than new subdivisions.”

Many participants at the forums stated that the Shoreline Master Program needs to consider differences between existing structures, people who own small undeveloped lots, and the potential for new development. There were many remarks in favor of flexibility for existing structures, but concern about future development in high risk shoreline areas, particularly at a large scale or on parcels which have not yet been divided.

“My family has had a place on Lake Sutherland for generations—will we be able to upgrade our homes and docks?”

One example of an area that has been “grandfathered” (where there is already existing development) is Lake Sutherland. Many of the summer homes on Lake Sutherland and along other shoreline areas are old, and property owners are anxious to know what they will be able to do. Several residents suggested more information for existing landowners pertaining to seasonal algal blooms in the lake, management of lawns and vegetation, and standards for replacement of docks and other structures.

“For new development, we need to think in terms of 75-100 years not 25 years.”

Residents expressed a great deal of concern about future building in high risk areas such as floodplains and bluffs. It was acknowledged that most homes last for a hundred years or more and the life of the home should be considered in siting it on the property--both for the protection of the home and the protection of the environment. The design of new structures will need to relate to physical and geological factors that are specific to the site, and reflect the level of risk, regardless of what neighbors were allowed to do in the past.

“There are some great spots along the strait for surfing, boating, and kayaking, but if any more people find out about them it is going to be a big problem.”

Many people mentioned that there is a significant and growing amount of public use of some central strait beaches including Freshwater Bay and Murdoch Beach. These sites lack signage, parking, or garbage maintenance and in some cases the access crosses private lands. There is support for keeping these locations available to the public, with recognition that better signage will need to be accompanied by parking, garbage and vandalism control, and publicly owned access.

Eastern Clallam County

People and Communities:

Early settlers in eastern Clallam County referred to naïve newcomers as “Jimmy-come-latelys” and even gave one creek along Sequim Bay that name. This term was not complimentary as it implied that the newer settlers were poorly equipped to cope with local conditions. Perhaps this attitude continues today, as many long-term residents have expressed concern that new landowners along rivers and shorelines are unaware of the extent of change that can be wrought overnight due to floods, bank erosion, or bluff failures. However, new residents also bring energy, ideas, and new community networks to eastern Clallam County, and have been active participants in the many salmon restoration projects in the Dungeness and Sequim Bay watersheds.

The fastest growing portion of Clallam County is also the driest. Eastern Clallam County is in the rainshadow portion of the Olympic Peninsula, and the Sequim-Dungeness area has become a nationally known retirement area due to the climate, scenic attractions, and proximity to Seattle. Sequim, the largest community in this part of the County, has a median age of 59. Once predominately agricultural, the Sequim-Dungeness area is now populated with many retirement homes interspersed with lavender growers and a diminishing number of more traditional types of farms. The high growth rates, large turnover, and active real estate industry imply that many of the eight thousand or so residents of this part of Clallam County have been here for a decade or less.

Some of the longest-term residents in eastern Clallam County are the citizens of the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe. The Jamestown Band of S’Klallam Indians, named for their leader Lord James Balch, bought 200 acres on the Dungeness Bay shoreline for \$500 in gold coin in 1874. After a successful legal battle for federal recognition a century later, the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe established an official reservation and tribal center on Sequim Bay. Tribal leaders and elders chose the location for its cultural link to the natural resources of the shoreline as well as the central location to scattered tribal families in Port Townsend and Sequim.



Left: Dungeness River at Kinkadee Island 2002. Right: Sequim Bay. Randy Johnson photos

Ecosystem Characteristics and Important Functions: Sequim is known as a place, “Where water is wealth” and many of the controversies associated with ecosystem management in this part of the County relate to water—too little flow for salmon and agriculture at certain times of the year, too much flow for river residents during floods. Sub-standard water quality is also a problem along the waterways draining into Dungeness Bay, resulting from animal wastes and malfunctioning septic systems. The Dungeness River has been the subject of extensive study and mapping to determine the flood hazard potential and channel migration zone, and bank armoring has been cited as a major factor limiting salmon production. Other rivers along the strait, including Morse and McDonald Creeks, have similar issues related to flood hazard and the placement of development.

Dungeness Spit—the longest natural sand spit in the United States, is nourished by a series of feeder bluffs to the west. The eroding bluffs—so essential to the spit--have also been the source of much anxiety to waterfront homeowners. Similarly, the Miller Peninsula is characterized by a connected system of feeder bluffs and sand spits. Residents of Diamond Point on this peninsula express concern about road building and other activities that may accelerate shoreline erosion.

Key issues identified in focus groups and forums for the Shoreline Master Program update in the eastern Clallam County sub-region included the following:

“Once somebody fools around with the beach, the whole neighborhood is affected.”
“Fooling with the river is dynamite. You mess with the river, now my house is in danger.”

The higher levels of development in eastern Clallam County create closer neighbors—with all the benefits and problems that proximity brings. Although residents of the east end of the County agreed that property owners should be able to protect their property, there is strong awareness that what one person does along the shoreline will affect people downstream, along the beach, or even miles away due to sediment movement. Many people expressed the need to consider risk to the property owner, neighbors, and the environment in analyzing shoreline management regulations and permits, and there were suggestions for working on neighborhood-wide solutions in areas such as Monterra and Three Crabs Road. Riverfront and shoreline residents often remarked that the risk of living on rivers and beaches is (usually) outweighed by the enjoyment they derive from living in such a beautiful and dynamic location.

“The big concern for those of us on the bluff is, of course, the bluff.”

Bluff areas west of Dungeness Spit appear to be eroding at a rate of 0.5 to 3 feet on average but a single storm event or bluff failure can lop off as much as 28 feet of shoreline at a time. Bluff dwellers throughout Clallam County have a lot to worry about—drainage plans, setbacks, design, concrete pads, vegetation management, and climate change are very much on their minds, and many of them stated that enforcement is essential in preventing additional problems.

“The County should go to great lengths to warn prospective buyers of the risk.”

Throughout the County there were many residents expressing the need for more accessible information to existing and prospective landowners, particularly in high hazard areas like bluffs and riverfront properties. Residents supported more stewardship workshops and airphotos documenting changes over time; some suggested notice to title or other direct warnings.

“You can read the regulations until you fall into a coma, but you still can’t figure out what they say.”

There appears to be universal consensus that the existing set of regulations are unclear, difficult to read, and provide little guidance to landowners. Many residents stated that they could be better stewards with a clear list of do’s and don’ts and asked that “fuzzy language” be cleaned up in the next version of the Shoreline Master Program.

“Workshops for landowners have helped us be better stewards. We’d like to see more people take them.”

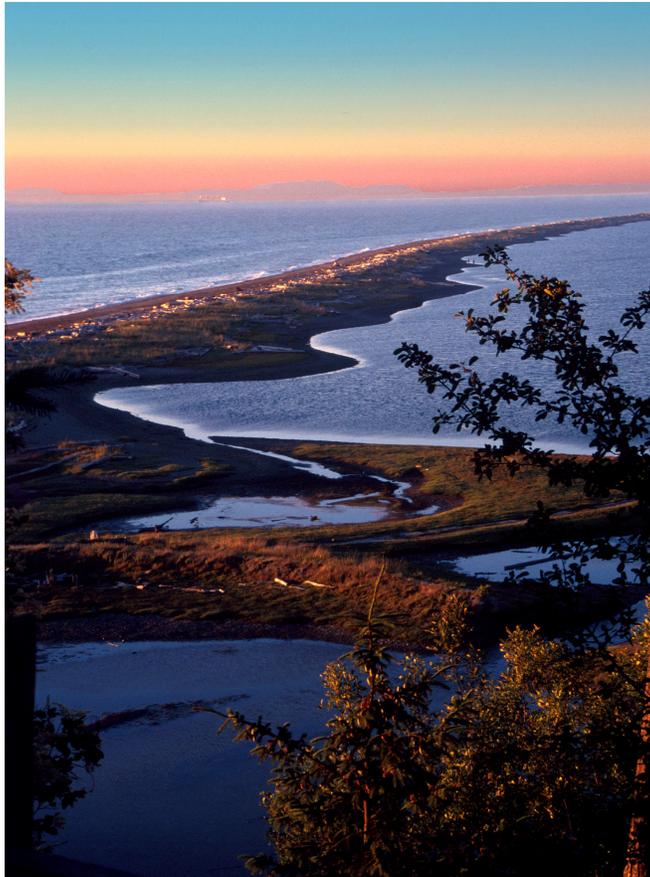
Throughout Clallam County there is a lot of support for landowner education and accessible information about shorelines and how they are changing. There is also substantial recognition that data, education, enforcement, and site analysis costs taxpayers money and the county has few staff or dollars.

“We used to let our [bed and breakfast] guests access the beach, but now we’re worried about liability, erosion, and increased problems from the public coming in as well.”

People in the east end of Clallam County indicated that public access opportunities are fairly good from Dungeness Spit to the east, and will improve as the Miller Peninsula State Park is eventually developed. However, public access to the west of Dungeness Spit, especially in the bluffs area, is very limited. Residents of the bluffs and the Miller Peninsula stated concerns about public and private access sites exacerbating erosion through construction of stairs and trails, parking, or road building. They also pointed out that beach trash is coming from the water as well as from upland visitors, and they have experienced vandalism, dogs, and other problems similar to other parts of the County.

Tribal Community Perspectives

Clallam County's tribal communities have had a front row seat to watch the transition of the shoreline since the arrival of the first explorers. Tribal ancestors supplied fish and shellfish to the first settlers, and modern day tribal citizens in Clallam County ship seafood products all over the world. Most of the tribes' concerns about the management of shorelines relate to respect for cultural traditions and preserving opportunities for the future. Their natural resources staff describe the need to protect and where possible restore the complex ecosystem processes that will support fish, shellfish and wildlife populations for the future. The tribes also point out that the state standard of "no net loss of ecological function" as new developments occur will not be enough to restore diminished salmon populations or polluted shellfish beds. Opportunities for restoration and clean-up will need to be factored in to the Shoreline Master Program update. In addition to natural resources concerns, tribes have special cultural concerns about the shorelines. The annual canoe journey passes along the Strait of Juan de Fuca shore, and tribal paddlers need safe and accessible places to rest as they maintain this tradition. Archaeological finds on the scale of Tse-Whit-Zen are rare, but tribal ancestors occupied many undeveloped locations throughout Clallam County shorelines. Tribes request that shoreline development regulations be structured to respect these sensitive and valuable sites.



Dungeness Spit: Randy Johnson photo

Clallam County's Shorelines In The Future

Clallam County residents have a long history of experience living along marine shorelines and rivers. It is clear that they care deeply about the place and their community, whether they have been here for generations or just a few years. Many long-term residents lament the decline of the wild character and the wide-open hunting, fishing, and tramping through the woods that was the epitome of the Olympic Peninsula experience. Others celebrate the north Olympic coast for the relief it offers from traffic, crowding, and concrete. Either way, most residents were drawn here or remain here because of the beauty of the environment and the connection to nature.

The people of the north Olympic Peninsula are practical—they recognize that the clock will not go backwards and things will not stay as they are, but this does not mean that the quality of life here will have to go backwards too. People want a future where the region is more prosperous ecologically, economically and socially. They want to see salmon return in greater numbers, and hope the Elwha will be successful in restoring the 100 pounders. They want the natural processes that form the unique beaches and spits of the shoreline to continue and be enhanced.

The goal of the 1976 Clallam County Shoreline Master Program is “to preserve, to the fullest extent possible, the scenic, aesthetic and ecological qualities of the shorelines of Clallam County, in harmony with those uses which are deemed essential to the life of its citizens.”

Clallam County residents value their timber heritage and want the forests to be used for the benefit of private and public interests. They seek tourism and the harvest of natural resources as part of a stable economy that supports working families and provides opportunity for younger generations to stay.

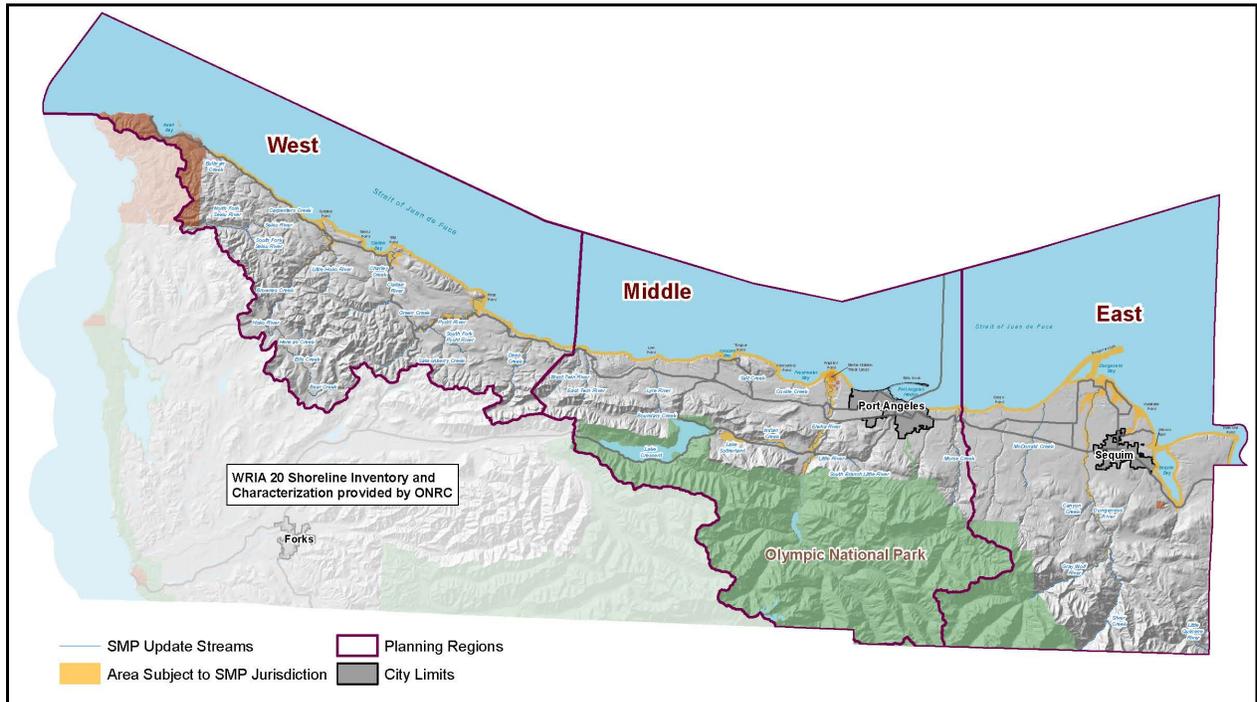
Public access to the shorelines enables people to connect with nature and each other. The ability to reach the beach in minutes is highly valued in Clallam County, and there is a strong desire for these opportunities to continue and expand.

Property owners want to be respected and acknowledged for their rights to use their land and commitment to be good stewards. Good stewards make good neighbors—this is especially true along the dynamic shorelines of Clallam County.

People want a county government that is effective at informing individuals and communities in making wise decisions, ensures that bad actions are discouraged and penalized, and sees that public resources and access are well managed. They want a government that is responsive to their needs and efficient in the use of scarce dollars.

Finally, people within and outside of Clallam County want an Olympic Peninsula shoreline that is at least as beautiful and productive as it is now. A successful picture of the future will likely contain more people, but it will also contain more fish and wildlife, sustainable forests, generations of working families, and accessible, clean beaches.

The Clallam County Shoreline Master Program Update



This Vision Statement applies to the shorelines that border or flow into the Strait of Juan de Fuca within Clallam County. The jurisdiction of the Shoreline Master Program applies to large lakes, marine waters and major rivers as well as a relatively narrow band of land along the waters—typically only about 200 feet wide except in floodplain and some wetland areas where it can be much wider. Although the Cities of Port Angeles and Sequim fall within this geographic region, the cities have jurisdiction for the management of the shorelines within their boundaries. Tribal lands are not regulated by the County but information is included in the Shoreline Master Program update documents.

Visioning efforts more specific to the rivers and lakes draining to the Pacific Ocean were led by the University of Washington-Olympic Natural Resource Center (ONRC) to assist Clallam County with update efforts. The results of these visioning efforts are available from UW-ONRC and also Clallam County Department of Community Development.

Additional public forums will be held throughout the update process. Summaries of these sessions and other information on the Shoreline Master Program update process are located at:

http://www.clallam.net/RealEstate/html/shoreline_management.htm