

Clallam County Shoreline Master Program Update

Summary of Public Forum Meetings—July 12-14, 2011

Clallam County hosted a total of five public forums from July 12-14, 2011 in four locations across Clallam County. The purpose of this set of forums was to provide information and answer questions about progress on the update of the Clallam County Shoreline Master Program. These forums focused on two recently released documents—the Vision Statement and the draft Inventory and Characterization Report and to ask for public input on the documents.

During the update process (which extends through 2012), citizens and other interested parties will have additional opportunities to participate or comment on the County's progress. A Shorelines Advisory Committee has also been formed to advise the County, consisting of local citizens, state agency and tribal representatives, and members of county watershed groups and other organizations. For more information on the public outreach process, please contact County staff at SMP@co.clallam.wa.us. Additional background information about the Clallam County Shoreline Master Program Update is located at:

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

Meeting Structure and Attendance

A team of consultants hired by the County facilitated discussions in each of the forums, with assistance from County staff.

July 12: Port Angeles, Clallam County Courthouse
July 13: Clallam Bay, Clallam Bay/Sekiu Lion's Club
July 13: Joyce, Crescent Community Grange
July 14: Sequim, John Wayne Marina (2 sessions)

Forums were advertised by newspaper articles, website postings, and direct mail. A total of over 80 private citizens attended the focus groups.

The public forums generally followed a standard agenda. Following welcome and introductions by Clallam County Department of Community Development staff, the consultants provided a presentation about the Shoreline Master Program Vision Statement and the Inventory and Characterization report. The session was then open to questions. (The powerpoint presentation is provided on the SMP Update website noted above.)

Key Questions from the Public Discussion

The following summarizes key points from the Consultant's presentation and the questions and comments raised by the meeting participants:

- **No Net Loss:** What does no net loss mean, especially to homeowners? No net loss is a state standard that requires the County to protect ecological functions along shorelines. This is a cumulative standard, meaning that things do not have to stay the same as they are now on every piece of property. However, the County is responsible for protecting shorelines, species, and habitats over the long term on a county-wide basis. It is easiest to describe in terms of examples. For example, the County will need to ensure that the source of sediment feeding sand spits and beaches is not cut off by a shoreline structure. Tree cover along rivers must be sufficient to provide habitat for bird species, prevent erosion of river banks, and provide large woody debris for fish habitat. Docks or overwater structures must not impair eelgrass and habitat for small fish to spawn.

The consultants noted that some indicators of ecological health are in good condition, such as kelp forests along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, but others are declining, such as raptor populations. A technical group has been formed by the County to grapple with defining No Net Loss in tangible terms. They will meet again later this summer.

- **Vegetation Management:** Several landowners discussed the need to maintain or restore vegetative cover along eroding bluffs and banks.

“The worst thing you can do if you live along the bluff is to de-nude it and plant grass. If you want a landslide, plant grass.”

Some landowners asked where they could get technical assistance. County staff indicated that some free assistance may be available, but complex situations will require that landowners obtain professional assistance on their own. Staff indicated that the update to the Shoreline Master Program will not require existing houses to move back; however, in previous public forums there has been interest in creating more flexibility for landowners to do so where their shoreline is eroding.

- **Land development issues:**
 - There were several questions about the difference between the categories in the report with respect to vacant land and development potential and comments that some of the definitions are confusing.
 - Some participants expressed concern about areas that are already platted in sensitive areas but are not yet developed, and there were comments that building permits should not be issued in setbacks, once established.
 - There were concerns and questions about property owners’ ability to rebuild or replace outbuildings, docks and bulkheads if burned or damaged. Participants said that under the current program rebuilt structures must comply with building codes if over 50% damaged. Existing structures, docks, etc. are not affected.
 - There were questions and comments about changing standards in the future, and the differences between minimizing risk to the environment, to a standard of no net loss, to the potential that restoration will become a requirement. The County must prepare a restoration plan as part of the Shoreline Master Program update, but there is no state requirement to require property owners or developers to improve existing conditions.

- **Geologic Hazards:** Shoreline landowners indicated they need better awareness of risks associated with tsunamis and earthquakes. Property owners along bluffs in different areas indicated that it may not be appropriate to use a one-size-fits-all approach to establishing setbacks, as the erosion rates differ in different locations.
- **Information access:** Several participants talked about the need to inform current and potential landowners about risks and actions that are likely to be prohibited. Also need to inform landowners periodically about what is and is not allowed. Some participants commented that it is important to have an accurate inventory, so that landowners will not have to hire consultants to contest incorrect information.

Specific regional comments:

- **Elwha dams:** It was noted that the removal of the Elwha dams creates special uncertainty in Clallam County. The Washington Department of Ecology and others are aware that sediment transport will change substantially as dams are removed.
- **Mouth of the Clallam River:** The river mouth closes due to changes in sediment movement. Currently have an agreement to open the mouth when necessary, but this is a man-made solution that will not address the problem over the long term. Issue needs work.
- **Eastern Clallam County:**
 - It was suggested that shellfish health status (for safe commercial and recreational harvest) be used as an indicator of ecosystem health, especially in Dungeness Bay.
 - *“We have some wetlands and estuaries that aren’t messed up; we should put our dollars to protecting those, instead of ‘nickel and diming’ property owners.”*
 - There was a comment that there is now a lot more data on erosion and flood hazard zones in eastern Clallam County which should be used for the inventory and characterization and in future permit processing.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The County is seeking public input on the Inventory and Characterization Report, especially for accuracy and missing data. The first round of comments is requested by August 31, 2011. Final comments on the Inventory and Characterization Report are due by October 31, 2011.

The report will be used to prepare draft environmental designations for Clallam County shorelines, to be discussed in September. Following this step, the County will move forward in drafting strategies, policies and revising regulations. Draft strategies will be presented in late 2011 for review and comment by the public prior to the review by the Planning Commission and decision-making by the Board of County Commissioners.