



Draft Plan Needs Your Review

Shellfish Protection District

Thurston County invites you to share your opinions on a draft plan to create shellfish protection districts for the Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach/McAllister Creek watersheds. The draft was forged from information we received from a wide array of involved citizens, including local homeowners, farmers, master builders, environmental interests, and shellfish growers.

Please read inside to learn about the proposal, and join us at our next meeting on Monday, Oct. 1. As always, we welcome your views and suggestions. (Need a refresher on this issue? See the back page.)

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Our thanks to all involved

Since November, Thurston County and local residents have worked together to figure out how to comply with a state law requiring the county to create a shellfish protection district.

People shared their views through stakeholder interviews, written surveys, public forums, and discussions within civic and professional groups. Many people also visited our web site: www.co.thurston.wa.us/shellfish.

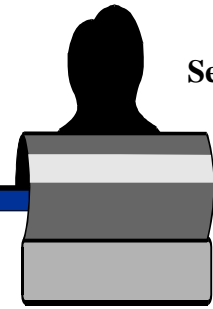
We also sought public input through mailings, television broadcasts, and newspaper articles. Our thanks to all of you who have kept informed of this important effort.



What's next?

Thurston County will schedule one more public meeting to allow people to compare a draft ordinance with the proposal described inside this bulletin. Commissioners will then schedule a public hearing on the draft ordinance. A meeting notice will be mailed when the dates are set.

September
2001



**Join our next meeting,
Monday Oct. 1.**

Time: Open house from 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Questions and answers with staff from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Staff will be available for further discussion from 8 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Place: **Heritage Hall** at the Thurston County Fairgrounds, 3054 Carpenter Rd. S.E. in Olympia.

Agenda: Opening remarks by Commissioner Kevin O'Sullivan, followed by a discussion of the draft proposal. A staff panel will respond to questions from the audience. Thurston County staff will represent health and stormwater issues. Staff from the Thurston Conservation District will answer questions relating to agriculture.

**DRAFT
PROPOSAL**

First phase calls for no additional funding or regulations

The public told us to take a phased approach to creating a shellfish protection district. Participants said the first phase should involve the following: correct known sources of fecal contamination, increase monitoring, report test findings, and -- finally -- develop a plan for the next phase. The public also advised us not to increase taxes or fees, or add more regulations, until we have more information about the sources of contamination. The draft reflects these sentiments.

Boundaries

What we heard



The draft proposal

Create two separate shellfish protection districts based on watershed boundaries.

Create two separate districts based on watershed boundaries.

Work approach for phase one

What we heard

Correct known sources of fecal coliform.



The draft proposal

Failing septic systems

The Environmental Health Department will continue its current program:

- ◆ Identify and correct failing systems by using complaints, evidence of failed systems, voluntary inspections, and existing permit-review processes.
- ◆ Provide loans to help qualified homeowners repair failing septic systems.
- ◆ Ensure that septic system owners are properly operating and maintaining their systems in accordance with their certificates.

Stormwater

- ◆ Continue building capital projects within shellfish watersheds. Also continue to operate and maintain existing county-owned stormwater facilities within the watersheds.
- ◆ Focus public information and education programs on methods residents can use to help reduce the amount of fecal coliform bacteria that ends up in stormwater runoff.
- ◆ Explore innovative project solutions aimed at reducing the amount of fecal coliform bacteria that is transported in stormwater.

Correct known sources of fecal coliform (continued). →

The draft proposal (continued)

Land use

◆ Continue improving enforcement of, and compliance with, existing land-use regulations and permit conditions.

Agriculture

- ◆ Encourage farm owners to voluntarily use best management practices.
- ◆ Promote compliance with existing regulations and the county’s nonpoint pollution ordinance by following up on complaints and acting upon existing agreements between the Thurston Conservation District, the state Department of Ecology, and Thurston County.

Do not increase taxes or fees, or add more regulations, until Thurston County has more information to effectively target nonpoint sources that make a difference. →

Testing

- ◆ Sample storm events in Henderson watershed.
- ◆ Sample Woodard and Woodland creeks.
- ◆ Sample McAllister Creek again.
- ◆ Identify fecal coliform sources through DNA testing in both watersheds (Henderson in 2001 and McAllister in 2002).
- ◆ Ecology is coordinating water quality studies with the county in both watersheds.



Continue public involvement. →

- ◆ Route land-use development proposals to interest groups for review and comment.
- ◆ Build a public-involvement plan before moving to phase 2. This will help ensure the public remains involved in the decision-making process.

In concert with the public, develop a framework for phase 2 while the first phase is underway. →

- ◆ Report test results.
- ◆ Develop phase 2 work program.
- ◆ Develop funding options.
- ◆ Decide how to continue public involvement in district issues.

(continued next page)

The details of Phase 2 are yet to come, however, it will likely entail continuing public involvement in the process, refining boundaries (if necessary), and implementing plans to reduce fecal coliform bacteria.



A refresher on the shellfish protection district mandate

In October and November 2000, the state Department of Health closed nine acres in the Henderson Inlet and 74 acres in Nisqually Reach to the direct harvesting of commercial shellfish. Harvesting was closed because fecal coliform bacteria levels in the two areas were unacceptably high. The closures triggered a state law that requires Thurston County to form a shellfish protection district.

Henderson Inlet

In June 2001, the state Department of Health placed another 300 acres of Henderson Inlet under commercial harvesting restriction. Under the new restriction, shellfish harvesters must wait five days to harvest shellfish when it rains one-half inch or more during a 24-hour period. This is roughly how long it takes for the water quality to improve after storms wash pollutants into the inlet.

Because of the rainfall patterns here in Thurston County, the June restriction effectively means that no shellfish harvesting can take place for about one-third of the year in the most recently downgraded areas of Henderson Inlet. This new restriction also invoked the state shellfish protection district law.

These recent downgrades, coupled with restrictions in earlier years, mean that today there are 128 acres in Henderson Inlet where harvesting is prohibited, and 360 acres that are closed after rain events of one-half inch or more in 24 hours.

In Henderson Inlet, shellfish harvesting is prohibited altogether in 128 acres. Another 360 acres cannot be harvested for five days when it rains a one-half inch or more over a 24-hour period.

In Nisqually Reach, 74 acres are off-limits to direct* shellfish harvesting. Another 2,036 acres cannot be harvested for five days when it rains one inch or more over a 24-hour period.

Nisqually Reach

The Nisqually Reach also has conditional restrictions on shellfish harvesting. In certain areas, shellfish harvesters must wait five days to harvest shellfish when it rains one inch or more during a 24-hour period. This condition applies to 2,036 acres of tideland. The October and November closures placed an additional 74 acres off-limits to direct* harvesting.

“Direct harvesting” means the growers cannot harvest the shellfish and take them directly to market. Instead, they must relocate shellfish in cleaner waters for a certain period of time before selling them. This is cost-prohibitive for growers in the Nisqually Reach area.