



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Cathy Wolfe  
District One

Sandra Romero  
District Two

Karen Valenzuela  
District Three

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

Sherri McDonald, RN, MPA,  
Director  
Diana T. Yu, MD, MSPH  
Health Officer

**Nisqually Reach and Henderson Inlet Shellfish Protection District**  
And  
**Nisqually Reach Septic System Operation & Maintenance Project Committee**  
Draft Meeting Notes March 16, 2010

Members present:

Christine Buckley, Mat Buldis (Aquaculture), Tris Carlson, Glen Connelly (Homeowner Associations), Mark Fischer (Community Shellfish Farm), David Hall (alternate for Conservation District), Peter Heide, Randall Hurst (Septic Professionals), Erin Keith (City of Lacey), Linda Malatesta, Fred Michelson, Gregory Moe (Realtors), Will Stakelin (Olympia Master Builders), Bryan Wilson, Mike Zblewski (Developers), Mike Zittel (Marinas)

**County Staff:** Mark J. Swartout (Shellfish Protection District Staff), Sue Davis, Art Starry, and Linda Hofstad (Environmental Health)

**State Staff:** Lynn Schneider (DOH), Lawrence Sullivan (DOH), Cindy James (DOE), Roma Call (PSP)

1. Introductions: Regular Shellfish District business will be put on hold until after this project is completed.
2. Schedule, Rules and Expectations:
  - a. There will be 4 meetings, one each month through June.
    - i. March 16 – history and education on septic operation and maintenance
    - ii. April 20 – Review and evaluate Henderson Pilot O&M program  
Preliminary design of public outreach strategy
    - iii. May 18– Formulate Nisqually proposal
    - iv. June 15 – Review and refine proposal
    - v. After June the program will go to the Board of County Commissioners / Board of Health, followed by public outreach events.

b. Rules:

- i. Decision making:
    - 1. Make every effort to reach consensus. If no consensus we set it aside and bring it back to try to resolve any issues.
  - ii. Rule #1 – Respectful of others
  - iii. Rule #2 – Comment and discuss ideas and concepts rather than personalities.
  - iv. Rule #3 – Due to ambitious schedule please keep comments concise and brief.
- c. Expectations:
- i. Program Goals: ensure that on-site sewage systems are properly operated and maintained to protect the health of county residents and preserve the quality of the county's water resources.

### 3. Nisqually Reach Watershed

#### a. History –

- i. Review LIDAR map, which shows clearly where glaciers left their mark.
- ii. Reviewed maps of the current boundary of the Nisqually Shellfish District.
- iii. Commercial Shellfish Harvest Classification Chronology – included in handout material
  - 1. 1992 – 1000 acres downgraded from Approved to Conditionally approved.
  - 2. 2000 –
    - a. 74 acres downgraded from Conditionally Approved to Restricted
    - b. 20 acres upgraded from Conditionally Approved to Approved.
  - 3. 2002 – 960 acres upgraded from Conditionally Approved and Restricted to Approved.
  - 4. 2006 -
    - a. 37 acres upgraded from Restricted to Approved
    - b. 120 acres downgraded from Approved to Prohibited
    - c. 197 acres downgraded from Unclassified to Prohibited
  - 5. 2009 – 12 acres upgraded from Restricted to Approved.

#### b. Water Quality –

- i. Discussed many of the water quality improvement projects – included in handout material and a website will be set up to include links to all the reports.
  - 1. The group approved that the website can include the names and who they represent but no additional contact information.
  - 2. Discussed that the original district boundary was set as a planning boundary.
  - 3. The O&M Program boundary will be established by this group.
- ii. Discussed water quality data and information from the State Department of Health and County Environmental Health Division.

1. Showed on the map where the commercial shellfish beds and the water sampling stations are located.
2. Prohibited areas are from McAllister Creek to the Nisqually River and a shoreline segment around Mill Bight.
3. Marine water samples are taken on a regular basis. They are taken monthly in the South half of the Reach and every other month in the North half as per national shellfish sanitation requirements.
4. Shoreline sanitary surveys are done every 8 years near commercial shellfish beds.
  - a. Sample any source of flowing water along the marine shoreline.
  - b. Looking for failing septic systems.
  - c. Noting agricultural practices.
  - d. Mill Bight area has a Prohibited restriction due to high levels of fecal coliform in the nearshore water samples.
5. Along the Mill Bight shoreline area the EHD received permission to dye test 18 systems of the 36 identified properties (50% voluntary compliance). There was a failure rate of 33% - 6 of the 18 tested systems.
6. Slightly more than half of failing systems are broken parts of the system and do not require replacement of the entire system.
7. Failing systems are not caused by any specific factor; they range from old to new, simple to complex, etc.
8. The EHD takes monthly water quality samples of McAllister Creek above the tidal influence – site below the I-5 bridge at the Nisqually interchange.
  - a. There has been a significant improvement from agriculture lands.
  - b. Even with all the good work to reduce bacteria, the targeted bacteria loading goals in the TMDL (to incrementally move toward meeting water quality standards) are not being met.
  - c. The County is actively trying to improve stormwater quality, which is a requirement of the Clean Water Act's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit.

c. Challenges:

- i. Nisqually is very large. Where should the program boundary be set?
- ii. Is there a difference with a Reach as opposed to an inlet?
- iii. The Nisqually water quality issues are different and not as dramatic as they were in Henderson.
- iv. The Nisqually has geoduck aquaculture which has the potential to be a concern.

d. Positive

- i. We have experience in establishing a successful program.

- ii. We've had public support.
  - iii. Most past obstacles have been resolved.
4. Septic Systems 101 - What is a risk-based operation and maintenance program?
- a. Primary purpose of this project is to protect public health.
  - b. Septic systems on most rural properties will be the only sewer treatment system available.
  - c. Septic systems need continued maintenance in order to operate properly.
  - d. Many property owners do not know how to operate and maintain their septic systems.
  - e. High risks have a more intense and frequent testing and evaluation.
  - f. Low risks have a less intense and frequent testing and evaluation.
  - g. High Risk systems are based on:
    - i. Soil types; and
    - ii. Proximity to surface water.
    - iii. Testing is done every 3 years and a dye test every 6 years
  - h. Low Risk - frequency of inspection is every 3 years.
  - i. Success is primarily due to public education and residents taking ownership of and responsibility for their septic systems.
  - j. The Henderson program requires an operational certificate and is issued every 3 years depending on the outcome of receiving the necessary documentation that the system was inspected and passed.
5. Comments and Questions
- a. Call this the Nisqually Reach Shellfish Protection Program.
  - b. Need perspective in how the Nisqually Reach compares to other areas.
  - c. Need to address the cost to property owners. How are high and low risk systems located?
  - d. Where are the commercial shellfish growing areas?
  - e. Why not look at the area all the way to the Nisqually River and up the river?
  - f. How can we address people on fixed incomes who have to repair their systems and may not be in the Senior and Disabled Program? County has a low/no interest load and a grant program to assist low income property owners. The Henderson Program also has elements to address this issue.