

Position Paper

Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 16¹ (Skokomish – Dosewallips Watershed)

Planning Unit Roles and Responsibilities

The creation of the Puget Sound Partnership (Partnership) has afforded the opportunity to define the unique roles watershed Planning Units might play in terms of interacting with the Partnership, Action Areas and Action Agendas.

Many discrete watershed planning groups in Puget Sound are actively involved in comprehensive planning efforts under Washington State law (RCW 90.82). The WRIA 16 Planning Unit, after over 6 years of effort, adopted its comprehensive plan in May 2006, and is currently developing a Detailed Implementation Plan for the 82 recommendations contained therein. Many of the recommendations are for the whole of Hood Canal.

Members of the Planning Unit include Mason and Jefferson Counties, the Skokomish Tribe, Mason and Jefferson PUD's, the State, concerned residents, and individuals representing a broad array of community interests including farming, real estate and economic development, recreation and commercial shellfish.

RCW 90.82 (AKA The Watershed Planning Act) states that the purpose of the Act “...*is to develop a more thorough and cooperative method of determining what the current water resource situation is in each water resource inventory area of the state and to provide local citizens with the maximum possible input concerning their goals and objectives for water resource management and development.*”

The law goes on to say: “*The legislature finds that the local development of watershed plans for managing water resources and for protecting existing water rights is vital to both state and local interests. The local development of these plans serves vital local interests by placing it in the hands of people: Who have the greatest knowledge of both the resources and the aspirations of those who live and work in the watershed; and who have the greatest stake in the proper, long-term management of the resources.*”

The Act encourages Planning Units “...*to identify projects and activities that are likely to serve both short-term and long-term management goals and that warrant immediate financial assistance from the state, federal, or local government. If there are multiple projects, the planning group shall give consideration to ranking projects that have the greatest benefit and schedule those projects that should be implemented first.*”

From the outset of this effort, Planning Unit members recognized the common sense of including the south shore of Lower Hood Canal (located in WRIA 14) in its comprehensive

¹The WRIA 16 Planning area also includes the portion of WRIA 14 that drains into Hood Canal [WRIA 14 (b)].

planning. An agreement was reached between the WRIA 14 and 16 Planning Units to accommodate this. (The 2008 Legislature passed SB 6204 which formally recognized this planning area as WRIA 14b, and authorizes the WRIA 16 Planning Unit to include this drainage in their ongoing planning efforts). The WRIA 16 comprehensive watershed planning area therefore encompasses Hood Canal drainage basins along all the south shore from just west of Belfair, then north along the west shore up to and including the Dosewallips River.

Acknowledging the importance of considering all of Hood Canal in its planning, the WRIA 16 Planning Unit hosted a series of forums. Tribes, local governments, Planning Unit members and interested parties from throughout the canal were invited to discuss common areas of concern and priority. These forums assisted the WRIA 16 group in developing the Hood Canal-specific recommendations contained in their plan.

Coordination of the planning efforts of WRIAs 16 and 17 (covering the remaining western shore) continues today through the common representation to both active Planning Units by the Skokomish Tribe, the State, Jefferson County and Jefferson PUD.

The WRIA 16 Planning Unit is a uniquely qualified planning entity in Hood Canal for a number of reasons:

- The significant amount of Hood Canal area covered in its plan
- The “comprehensive” nature of its planning, including water quality, water quantity as well as habitat
- The broad spectrum of local agencies and interest groups involved; the only comprehensive watershed planning organization in Hood Canal which includes representatives from tribes, agencies of local government, business and citizens
- The adoption of its plan by the Planning Unit and unanimous approval of the plan by the Mason and Jefferson County Boards of County Commissioners
- The eighteen Hood Canal-specific recommendations contained in the plan
- The ongoing participation in the Hood Canal Dissolved Oxygen Program and other science-based studies
- The intimate knowledge of local agency activities and capacities
- The proven ability to reach consensus on important issues among a diverse group of local interests
- The proven commitment among members to resolving challenging issues based on mutual trust and respect

The Planning Unit will continue to play a prominent role in the following:

- Prioritizing Hood Canal water resource and water quality projects and activities
- Developing project proposals for funding by Ecology and other grant partners
- Implementing projects and activities as appropriate
- Communicating “local” information locally
- Advising the Partnership on operational and organizational matters relative to the Hood Canal Action Area and Action Agenda
- Providing review and comment on the effectiveness of Hood Canal-wide projects and activities