

Big Bend SPD Meeting #4

3/27/2017

Short pre-meeting chat with attendees about different closure zones in Hood Canal Growing Area #6 as shown on map handouts.

Meeting convened formally at 1:05p.

Mason County Public Health opened with discussing formatting changes and highlighted addition of new definitions of acronyms. Discussion continued on differentiating the closure zones in Hood Canal #6 between conditionally approved zones near Station 292, and the seasonally closed zone surrounding Alderbrook Marina. Detailed the inclusion of National Shellfish Sanitation Program standards in the plan, as well as more technical information on Shellfish Protection Districts.

Mason County Public Health made a statement about how the goal is to improve water quality's trend and not just have readings hovering around the threshold for reclassification.

Q: What does developing preventative measures mean?

A: This is a part of community education and outreach.

Suggestion made about how colors between different legend items on the maps should have a higher contrast. A hashed line for shellfish closure zones might be more visually descriptive.

Brief discussion on parcels containing Holding tanks and whether they were removed, replaced, or currently used. The structures were removed, but the Holding Tanks are still in service, utilized by RVs.

Q: What is an ATU?

A: Aerobic Treatment Unit: contains an air blower that provides an oxygen rich environment for microbial treatment.

Suggestion was made to include brief descriptions of On-Site sewage system types.

Mason County Public Health relayed the information that Alderbrook Gold course's storm water management has been in contact and has been included to address any applicable issues related to storm water management from the golf course.

Suggestion was made to characterize the data from the maps, such as percentage of systems failing, out of compliance, aging, etc. DOH offered to provide this kind of quantified data where they have it to Mason County Public Health.

Pg 10: Detailed map showing ages of systems, noting that many older systems are shoreline.

Q: What is station 309? Is that a newer station?

A: Not exactly. Stations are added linearly, so station 309 being somewhat closer to 292 and 291 numerically indicates it's probably become a sampling station around the same time as 292 and 291.

Collaboration between DOH and Mason County Public Health as far as sampling is concerned discussed. DOH conducts marine sampling; Mason County Public Health conducts freshwater sampling from streams and shorelines.

Q: Was a request made to implement or determine how a new rain gauge could be made?

DOH A: Not as of yet.

Q: Does DOH have resources, financial or technical, for citizens to be able to set up a rain gauge on their own initiative?

DOH A: Definitely technical resources.

Q: Was there an attempt to get rain data from Taylor?

A: An attempt was made: The data from is not published online, and is only sent once per month from Taylor to DOH. (Explained that this was the reason for the blank section under rainfall in the handout.)

Short discussion on the events of May 11th from a high spike in the most recent data is shown. Suggestions for avenues of investigation to get an idea of what kind of activities were taking place that day and week prior were discussed.

Q: Do you feel if we have a good description of what the situation is? Do we have a stronger or more defined description?

A: We're getting there. It is hard to make a compelling case when standards are being met for water quality, but when levels are trending closer to the threshold of those standards.

Q: Is the red line on the graph on page 14 43 FC/100mL?

A: Yes.

Q: Why was there no DOH Sample from Feb 2016?

DOH A: I don't know specifically, but there are a number of factors that could've have caused that: Boat in the shop, shortage of available staff, etc.

Q: The area meets standards?

A: Yes

Q: Then why are we even here?

A: Risk mitigation. The downgrade cannot be reversed until work is done in the watershed to address the downgrade, which is what this meeting is attempting to start.

Q: What is our goal then here?

A: We are trying to upgrade from 'Conditionally Approved' to 'Approved.'

-But it says it is meeting standards.

DOH: It is, but no work has occurred yet, which is required for reclassification.

-But there is only one reading that doesn't meet standards; we have to go back years to get a reading that is above standards.

DOH: Assessment takes risk into account, which is not just meeting standards, to consider reclassifying a shellfish growing area. It is not just raw data.

Q: What will boots on the ground do?--Will it stop pollution?

A: It will reduce risk. We are looking at high risk areas, and so we need to identify risks to reclassify

The maps included in the handout illustrate the risks we are looking at in the area.

Q: If we are doing this to identify and minimize risk, are we doing this in other areas?

A: Yes.

Q: So we should have a template for this kind of work?

A: Yes. This is a template. The matrices included are much a part of that. We are using a template used around the county and state. However, the work is very site specific.

For instance: In Oakland Bay there is more agricultural activity so there's more promotion of Best Management Practices, whereas in Allyn there is much more development, which constrains the wildlife population into a high density area.

Q: Will this process get easier?

A: Yes, it most certainly can get easier.

Reiterated that PIC work will look different depending on wherever it is being done.

Moved onto covering work plan matrix.

Part C breaks down matrix into 10 main tasks.

Read through tasks 1-10 before explaining each step in detail.

Suggestions for revising new maps were made.

Task 5 is where work becomes recognizable.

Read through details of the work in the matrix.

DOH and Mason County Public Health will coordinate sampling efforts.

Q: This grant ends October 2017?

A: Yes, this is an EPA funded grant, given to Mason County Public Health through DOH.

Q: Is the EPA the sole source of funding for this project?

A: Yes, for this project. Grants are actively sought to continue work. Commissioners are involved in this process as well.

Money used in water quality correlates with improvement. However, work tends to keep revolving around the county, attempting to bring in as many people and agencies for assistance. Work is conducted in one area to improve water quality, and then moves elsewhere to continue. What can result is a sort of "Water Quality Rollercoaster" where once work is completed, quality goes back down.

Mason County Public Health's focus tends to highlight routine maintenance of on-site sewage management systems, resulting in repairs over replacement. Preventing a failure is key.

Q: Is there a forecast for grant funding after October 2017?

A: We do not really know where funding is at for this specific grant beyond October 2017. However, there is still the greater Hood Canal Coordinating Council PIC work.

This work is covered under grants for PIC work for the whole of Hood Canal through 2019. This grant for Big Bend SPD is specialized for work for just in Big Bend.

Q: When is the federal fiscal year end?

A: August 31st, Next year's begins September 1st.

Short discussion about federal funding, EPA funding, federal budgets, and looming threats of government shutdowns ensued.

Let's move on and make a plan and not get bogged down over worries about the financial climate of the federal government.

Approval is needed for work on tasks 5-10.

Steps 1-4 show what we've already done. Tasks 5-10 are what we will do and are doing today.

Suggestion was made to clarify language in that "Mason County Public Health will sample" rather than a general "bracket sampling rainfall events and peak use sampling." Discussed better language and definitions to be used for work plan.

Stakeholders inquired about Mason County Conservation District's involvement in the project work plan, noting that no MCD representative was present for the meeting. Stakeholders expressed hesitance to discuss matters involving MCD without them being present.

Q: Where does MCD's funding come from?

A: A variety of sources: Federal Farm Bill, NRCS, EPA, and other sources. Mason County Public Health tries to include MCD referrals in the budget.

Q: Is there a timeline for Part C? (Strategy for Water Quality Improvement)

A: It is ongoing as work is authorized and proceeds.

Suggestion was made to add a task that is a farm survey. MCD can't provide a farm plan, but can be assured are aware of our work and are willing to help when referenced. Stakeholders expressed an importance to inventory number of farms, number of animals, and number of farm plans developed, within Big Bend SPD.

MCD is not the only agency involved with agricultural activity. They are a preferable option, but/because they are not an enforcement or regulatory agency.

Q: Can we force anyone to do anything?

A: For septic systems, yes. Department of Ecology and Department of Agriculture can be involved for enforcement.

A decision was made to include an enforcement provision in the work plan.

Stakeholders expressed concern over Mason County Public Health's ability to enforce failing septic systems if there isn't an equal or comparable capacity to enforce agricultural activity. Attempted to clarify that the enforcement Mason County Public Health can utilize is about failing systems, not just a presence of pollution in surface waters.

Mason County Public Health conducts sanitary surveys: details livestock, pets, septic and land use, and after-the-fact as-builts. A lot of inventorying comes as a result of sanitary surveys.

Suggestion to postpone discussion on task #6 since MCD isn't present.

Stakeholder returned discussion to May 11th's high reading. Insisted an investigation be made into a specific area of horse activity. A point was made that Mason County Public Health will investigate this, but the work needs to be approved so that the events of May 11th can be addressed.

Stakeholders made a point that agricultural activity is increasing in the hills above the shellfish growing area, and it is important to see the whole picture, rather than hone in on just one component.

Q: Because there is only one high reading of fecal coliform from Station 292, then pollution from things like pet waste, which are continuously deposited, shouldn't be important because there's one event to pinpoint the high reading from?

A: They are important: readings are steadily increasing towards the threshold, despite any high hits. That is the other water quality concern.

We have been at this for a while: discussing the May 11th event. We will look into it. We have to get through this approval process so we can go after any pollution coming from horses.

Detailed Task #7: OSS Maintenance. Reiterated the components of sanitary surveys. Explained post-corrective sampling: the process of sampling after repairs are fixed and failures replaced.

Q: Are mailings the only form of communication?

A: Not just mailings, but mailings tend to be the most efficient route of communicating to homeowners. Otherwise Mason County Public Health follows up on systems out of compliance or with Unsatisfactory Service Events as reported by licensed O&M specialists.

Q: Does Mason County Public Health make a presence at public events?

A: Certainly.

Suggestion was made that protocols for data entry be created to improve coordination and communication with Mason County Public Health and the building and planning departments.

Stakeholders expressed a concern about the county investing funds in glossy mailings and the inefficiency of door to door contact.

Mason County Public Health assured stakeholders that the mailings are not glossy mailings, and that phone numbers and emails rarely stay current to the point they can reliably or efficiently be used to contact homeowners.

Brief discussion about communication between Planning, Building, and Public Health departments. Mason County Public Health expressed that the merging of these departments into one Community Services will help with ongoing coordination.

Q: What happens if someone tries to build a house on a parcel with a septic system out of compliance?

A: Permits will not be issued.

Stakeholders suggested that incentives such as rebates be tied to something. For instance: OSS Rebates to be provided only to those attending an educational workshop on septic system maintenance.

Task #8: Education

Events being held, outreach events, etc, were discussed among stakeholders, as well as opportunities to tie in incentives.

DOH suggested that specific entities being involved be added to education and outreach.

Suggestion to add into Task #7, OSS Maintenance, a monitoring of Large On-Site Sewage systems as a line item.

Q: How are food establishments addressed? There should be follow ups on commercial systems.

A: Mason County Public Health expressed the importance of reporting issues such as alarms going off in commercial establishments so that they can be followed up on. Please report issues!

Q: Are there any Tribal education events?

Skokomish A: Earth Day, Health Fair.

Oyster Month in Union was mentioned, as well as the merits of Pier to Peer, for community outreach opportunities.

Task #9:

Wildlife will be inventories where we can identify wildlife activity.

Pet waste management is identified as a part of sanitary surveying, and addressed through education.

Work with Public Works and Department of Transportation to coordinate efforts concerning storm water management.

Suggestion was made to add a line item inventorying illicit discharges into storm water systems.

Discussion about pet waste stations to be made available in public areas, marinas, etc, and potential feasibility and opportunities to implement them within the scope of the grant work.

SeaGrant offered to provide data on seal populations, and might be able to get relevant bird population data.

Q: Is there a storm water retention pond Operation and Maintenance schedule in place?

A: Many of these are on private lands and not county or state.

Stakeholders suggested inventorying storm water ponds in the watershed, and develop a scheduling plan for maintenance.

Broaden inventory to be able to identify changes in compliance in storm water, along with agriculture inventories, septic, etc. This kind of inventory would allow for more rapid risk assessment.

Stakeholders stated that the week before May 11th was an anniversary celebration for a local store in the SPD.

Discussion about parcels containing Holding Tanks.

Q: Are holding tanks alarmed?

A: They should be, especially the newer ones.

Stakeholders stated that the alarms are all too often disabled or otherwise ineffectual. Stakeholders also suggested that Holding Tanks be should be designed to force backups into the home instead of overflowing out of the tank.

Mason County Public Health explained that licensed O&M specialists are educated on what they are required to do and report, and must attend such educational workshops are a requirement to remain licensed.

Questions about specific parcels being in or out of compliance ensued. Mason County Public Health referenced stakeholders to utilize septicsearch.com to be able to look at the service history and status of any parcels they are interested in. These records are public.

Moving onto Task #10.

DOH reiterated the need to include enforcement as a task, and detail different enforcement tasks. Inclusion of a flowchart explaining the enforcement process to be included.

Helpful to know who has authority over what, and how much of it.

Public Works authority on storm water, and so they should be involved to handle issues of illicit discharges, etc.

Q: What are the penalties?

A: For failing OSS, posting for non-occupancy. There is also a route for civil infractions resulting in tickets, although this can often result in offenders paying a fine, but not correcting the issue. There is also enforcement through the hearings examiner. Both Department of Agriculture and Department of Ecology have enforcement angles, but they would need to be addressed to know the scope and scale that they could be involved.

Mason County Public Health offered to set up another meeting, or conclude the meeting and continue further discussions remotely, and share info/comments through email and commentaries. Timeline for commenting was offered.

Discussion about file formats and agreeable mediums for sending documents remotely were discussed.

Q: We are trying to reduce risk?

A: Yes.

Q: What makes it high risk?

A: 25 years of data, poor soil drainage, high freshwater discharge.

Q: Sample date of May 11th is a huge spike. Why did it take 10 weeks for the next sample to be taken?

DOH A: Explained the lab procedures, and the process through which they monitor water quality through marine water samples. High hits are flagged and referenced to Mason County Public Health to investigate. The sampling DOH conducts are routine monitoring. Higher hits than on May 11th have occurred in the past, but have 'dropped off' due to the monitoring nature of the sampling. What is important is that water quality is not improving, despite spikes in reading (or lack thereof). There needs to be investigation into the watershed for reclassification to be considered.

Q: How could regulatory agencies be changed, how could they be made to be more efficient in following up on high readings?

A: Funding and manpower are the constraining factors in every agency's ability to be efficient in response and in communication.

Stakeholder made a final appeal to other stakeholders about the validity and feasibility of the work plan. Time and money are rapidly decreasing, and fears were expressed that once they run out, nothing will be able to be done in the future.

Bottom line: The goal is to lay out measurable objectives.

Stakeholder insisted that there will likely not be money from the feds for the next four years, so this work must count.

Agreed to send a revised version of the SPD plan out by April 3rd, leaving it open for comments until April 10th.

Announcements for available paper hard copies are also to be made.

Meeting concluded at 3:05p