

Samish Watershed Initiative

Progress Report and Recommendations
From Gerry O'Keefe, Executive Director, Puget Sound Partnership
December 8, 2011

Highlights: Successes to Date

Each of the state and local agencies have been able to shift resources from other crucial tasks to focus on critical area ordinance compliance, septic system inspections and potential water quality violations from farm operations. Skagit County, Ecology and WSDA inspectors have identified the most serious water quality problems that could impact shellfish bed re-opening in July 2012. Ecology has issued 47 warning letters, five orders and two penalties to date. Ecology and the Skagit Conservation District are working intensively to ensure landowner cooperation, which is critical for addressing the remaining significant problems by January 31, 2012. They believe this goal is achievable.

Expansion of the marine recovery area designation in the Samish Watershed is on schedule for adoption this month.

The Puget Sound Corps was successfully deployed to assist in remediation efforts on several critical properties. Pet waste and recreational toilets were deployed during the peak fishing season. Public education is ongoing. All of the elements of the 10-point action plan adopted by the Clean Samish Initiative are on plan.

Current water quality data indicates that there has been significant progress. Although we do not have this year's full data set, we do have the full data set for the spring months, which show a decline during the most critical timeframe in the watershed (See Samish river Fecal Coliform Loading graph, page 2).

Progress in addressing the most serious problems and current data suggest that improvements in water quality are on target to enable upgrading the shellfish beds in the Samish this summer.

Remaining tasks and challenges

A significant volume of work remains to complete inspections and monitor compliance within the watershed. This work is critical to address the cumulative potential contributions from properties in the watershed that could affect continued progress in meeting water quality standards. Skagit County has 5000 remaining inspections (½ of the estimated total required). The Conservation District has 36 of its initial 59 referrals remaining in its workload, requiring both short and long term planning. The CD and Ecology are conferring regularly to meet the January 31 deadline and address problems that may arise.

Skagit County and the Skagit Conservation District have indicated that the diversion of existing staff necessary to accelerate their work is not sustainable. Each agency has identified the need for one additional FTE. We are working with EPA to identify the funding that is necessary to go beyond the most serious problems and finish the work required to stay on target. Skagit County has been awarded an EPA grant, but still must negotiate terms.

WSDA has completed the current round of inspections, but remains available to assist. Ecology has 33 properties requiring first and follow-up inspections. Neither agency is currently requesting additional resources.

The Puget Sound Partnership will continue to monitor progress and assist its partner agencies in identifying and meeting resource needs.

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