

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Purpose

Mason County is updating its Shoreline Master Program (SMP). According to Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 6012, passed by the 2003 Washington State Legislature, cities and counties are required to amend their local SMPs consistent with the Shoreline Management Act (SMA), Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 90.58, and its implementing guidelines, Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 173-26.

The County is conducting the comprehensive SMP update in two phases over the next few years. The first phase is the development of an inventory and characterization of the shorelines within Mason County. This report provides the inventory and characterization study. In the second phase, the County will update its shoreline management policies and regulations.

This inventory and characterization documents baseline shoreline conditions and provides a basis for revising SMP goals, policies, and regulations for the County. This characterization will help to evaluate existing functions and values of shoreline resources, and explore opportunities for conservation and restoration of ecological functions.

This study also characterizes ecosystem-wide processes and how these processes relate to shoreline functions. Processes and functions are evaluated at two different scales: (1) a watershed or landscape scale, and (2) a shoreline reach scale. The purpose of the watershed or landscape scale characterization is to identify ecosystem processes that shape shoreline conditions and to determine which processes have been altered or impaired. The intent of the shoreline reach scale inventory and characterization is to: (1) identify how existing conditions in or near the shoreline have responded to process alterations; and (2) determine the effects of the alteration on shoreline ecological functions. The findings will help provide a framework for future updates to the shoreline management policies and regulations.

This study and analysis was prepared by ESA in collaboration with Coastal Geologic Services and Herrera Environmental Consultants. The work was completed in partnership with Mason County Planning and GIS staff and City of Shelton staff, along with review and comment by the Joint Technical Advisory Committee (JTAC).

Mason County is required to complete the SMP amendment process by December 2013. Funding for the SMP update has been provided by the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) through an SMA grant (Agreement No. G1100004). The state grant funds are provided by Washington State Biennia's General Fund for Shoreline Implementation, §302; and the Local Toxics Control Account, §302, Subsection 7. As per the requirements of the grant, Mason County is scheduled to complete its draft SMP by June 30, 2013.

1.2 Report Organization

The information in this report is divided into 12 Chapters. Chapter 1, the Introduction, discusses the purpose of this report and describes the regulatory context for shoreline planning. Chapter 2 describes the methods, approach, and primary data sources used for this inventory and characterization. Chapter 3 provides a profile of the ecosystems within the County. This ecosystem profile discusses regional overview, process controls (e.g., climate, geology), fish and wildlife, and key ecosystem-wide processes and landscape analysis.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide the shoreline inventory for the marine water bodies in Mason County: Hood Canal and South Puget Sound (including Case and Totten Inlets, and Oakland Bay). Chapters 6 through 9 focus on the freshwater shoreline rivers and lakes and are organized around the four main Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs) within Mason County. These WRIAs are designated by Washington Department of Ecology for watershed planning in the state. Shorelines in the following watersheds are addressed in Chapters 6 through 9: WRIA 14a (Kennedy-Goldsborough), WRIA 15 (Kitsap), WRIA 16/14b (Skokomish-Dosewallips), and WRIA 22 (Lower Chehalis). The WRIA 16 planning area includes all of the Hood Canal drainages along the south shore of the lower canal (this area is referred to as WRIA 14b).

A small portion of the northwest corner of Mason County is located within WRIA 21 (Queets-Quinault). However, this area lies entirely within federal lands (Olympic National Park), and no water bodies regulated by the SMA are located in the County's portion of WRIA 21. Therefore, WRIA 21 is not discussed further in this report.

The inventory provides physical and biological characterizations of conditions in the vicinity of the shoreline regulatory zones of the County. The chapters also provide assessments of shoreline use patterns, describe the built environment, and identify potential opportunity areas for protection, enhancement, restoration and public access.

Chapter 10 is an analysis of trends and future demand of shoreline uses, and potential land use conflicts. Chapter 11 is the shoreline analysis summary. Chapter 12 provides the reference list for this document.

Appendix A is a map folio that illustrates the shoreline planning areas within Mason County and documents various biological, land uses, and physical elements at the landscape analysis scale. Appendix B identifies the GIS data sources used in development of the map folio. Appendix C provides a glossary of technical terms used in this report.

1.3 Regulatory Overview

Washington's Shoreline Management Act (SMA) was passed by the State Legislature in 1971 and adopted by the public in a referendum. The goal of the SMA is "to prevent the inherent harm in an uncoordinated and piecemeal development of the state's shorelines." While protecting shoreline resources by regulating development, the SMA is also intended to provide for appropriate shoreline use. The SMA encourages public access and use of the shoreline and provision of water-dependent uses, as well as land uses that enhance and conserve shoreline functions and values.

The primary responsibility for administering the SMA is assigned to local governments through the mechanism of local shoreline master programs, adopted under guidelines established by Ecology. The guidelines (WAC 173-26) establish goals and policies that provide a framework for development standards and use regulations in the shoreline. The SMP is based on state guidelines but tailored to the specific conditions and needs of individual communities. The SMP is also meant to be a comprehensive vision of how the County's shoreline area will be managed over time.

1.4 Shoreline Jurisdiction and Study Area Boundary

SMA jurisdiction includes all *shorelines of the state* as defined in RCW 90.58.030. Shorelines of the state include the total of all *shorelines* and *shorelines of statewide significance*. "Shorelines" means all of the water areas of the state, including reservoirs, and their associated *shorelands*, together with the lands underlying them, *except*:

- Shorelines on segments of streams upstream of a point where the mean annual flow is 20 cubic feet per second (cfs) or less and the wetlands associated with such upstream segments; and
- Shorelines on lakes less than 20 acres in size and the wetlands associated with such small lakes.

“Shorelines of statewide significance” include rivers that have a mean annual flow of 1,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) or greater, freshwater lakes with a surface area of 1,000 acres or more, and portions of certain marine waters (RCW 90.58.030).

The shoreline area to be regulated under the Mason County SMP must include all shorelines of statewide significance, shorelines of the state, and their adjacent “shorelands,” defined as the upland area within 200 feet of the OHWM, as well as any “associated wetlands” (RCW 90.58.030). “Associated wetlands” means those wetlands that are in proximity to and either influence or are influenced by tidal waters or a lake or stream subject to the SMA (WAC 173-22-030 (1)). These are wetlands that physically extend into the shoreline jurisdiction, or wetlands that are functionally related to the shoreline jurisdiction through surface water connection and/or other factors.

Local jurisdictions can choose to regulate development under their SMPs for all areas within the 100-year floodplain or a smaller area as defined above (RCW 90.58.030(2)(f)(i)). For the purposes of this report, the entire 100-year floodplain is included in the study area or herein referred to as the shoreline planning area.

Numerous streams and lakes within Mason County are regulated as “shorelines of the state” under the SMA. Shorelines of statewide significance include all marine waters and shorelands of Hood Canal and marine waters of South Puget Sound seaward from extreme low tide. Lake Cushman (4,000 acres) and the main stem of the Skokomish River (greater than 1,000 cfs) downstream from the confluence of the East and West Forks, as well as their shorelands, are also shorelines of statewide significance.

1.5 Existing Plans, Programs and Regulations

1.5.1 Mason County Shoreline Master Program

Mason County adopted its first master program on August 12, 1975 (Mason County, 1975). In 2006, the county integrated the master program into the county’s comprehensive plan and development regulations as follows:

- *Chapter IX, Shoreline Management Program* of the Mason County Comprehensive Plan includes definitions and policies for shoreline use activities (e.g., aquaculture, marinas);
- *Title 17.50 Zoning – Shoreline Master Program Use Regulations* includes regulations for shoreline uses, criteria for approving conditional use permits and variances, and assigns shoreline environment designations to shorelines of the state (see Map 24);
- *Title 15.09.055* of the County code includes application, review, enforcement and approval processes for shoreline development.

1.5.2 Comprehensive Plan

The Mason County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 1996 and revised in 2005, contains goals and policies to guide land use decisions and the management of critical areas (Mason County, 2005). Fourteen “land use categories” are described in the plan. These categories serve as the basis for more detailed zoning code designations. Land use categories include:

- Rural Lands: Rural Activity Centers, Hamlets, Rural Commercial/Industrial Areas, Rural Tourist/Recreational Areas, Fully Contained Community, Master Planned Resource, and Rural Area
- Resource Lands: Long-Term Commercial Forest Lands, Agricultural Resource Lands, and Mineral Resource Lands of long-term commercial significance, and In-holding Lands
- Urban Growth Areas: City of Shelton and surrounding area, Allyn, and Belfair

Land use designations are relevant to this shoreline characterization report as they establish the general land use patterns and vision of growth the County has adopted for areas both inside and outside the shoreline planning area.

1.5.3 Zoning Code

Title 17 – Zoning of the Mason County Code establishes zoning districts in the County (see Map 23) (Mason County, 2011). These districts, which follow land use designations established in the Mason County Comprehensive Plan, include five rural residential zones, five rural commercial zones, one rural industrial zone, one rural natural resource zone, two rural tourist zones, one rural master planned resort zone, seven zoning districts for Shelton UGA, eleven zoning districts for Allyn UGA, and eight zoning districts for Belfair UGA.

1.5.4 Critical Areas Regulations

Mason County regulates activities in or adjacent to environmentally sensitive areas under Mason County Resource Ordinance, adopted in 2009 (Mason County, 2009). Critical areas protected by this code include wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, frequently flooded areas, landslide hazard areas, seismic hazard areas, erosion hazard areas, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas. The Mason County Resource Ordinance also establishes protections for long term commercial forest lands, agricultural resource lands, in-holding lands, agriculture and forest management non-designated lands, and mineral resource lands.

1.5.5 Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance

Mason County's flood damage prevention ordinance implements comprehensive flood damage reduction measures that are necessary for public health safety and welfare and that allow property owners to protect their property (Ordinance No. 87-08). The ordinance includes minimum requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program regulation and establishes a Special Flood Risk Zone for the floodplains of the Skokomish River, Vance Creek and tributaries.