



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

P.O. Box 47775 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7775 • (360) 407-6300

March 29, 2018

Dear Mason County resident,

The Washington Department of Ecology has received a number of questions related to Mason County's permitting process for the construction of a new storage lagoon at Bio Recycling Inc.'s North Ranch site on Webb Hill Road near Union. We wanted to collect these questions and answer them in this letter in order to provide the most complete information available.

Background

There has been a biosolids and septage management site at Webb Hill since 1986, originally operated by a company named Solganics, and later by Bio Recycling Inc.

Bio Recycling accepts septage – the solids removed from septic tanks and portable toilets during regular maintenance. Bio Recycling is the only commercial site on the Olympic Peninsula that accepts this material. The facility has also accepted treated sewage from wastewater treatment plants (including Alderbrook, Mason County's wastewater treatment plants, the Squaxin Island Tribe, the Skokomish Tribe, etc.).

At Bio Recycling's North Ranch facility, the treatment process includes separating the liquid and solids and treating the material with lime to kill pathogens and control odors. The solids removed during treatment are currently sent to other permitted farm sites in Washington for land application. The remaining liquid, which has been reduced to 0.5 percent solids, is land applied at the North Ranch site for the production of hay and pasture for grazing.

In 2007, groundwater testing at North Ranch found high levels of nitrates. Nitrates can come from sources such as fertilizers, manure and septic systems. Regular testing in the years since shows that this nitrate pollution has not migrated off the site or affected water quality in Hood Canal, but the levels remain above state standards.

As part of an Agreed Order with Ecology, Bio Recycling has taken a number of measures to better manage and reduce nitrates at the site, including cutting in half the amount of septage it accepts and installing equipment to separate nutrient-rich solids from liquids.

Current status

In 2015, Ecology issued a new statewide General Permit for biosolids, which regulates how biosolids and septage are treated and managed. As an existing facility, Bio Recycling was provisionally covered under the new permit. However, in October 2017, Ecology issued additional requirements for Bio Recycling through its final coverage letter for the facility.

The most important requirement was that Bio Recycling only apply septage and biosolids at North Ranch during times when there was an agronomic need – basically, when plants are growing and can use the water and nutrients. Doing this should act to minimize movement of nitrate through the soil, and reduce any chance that nitrates could reach groundwater. In practice, this means the company could only land apply during the drier months of the year.

Mason County resident

March 29, 2018

Page 2

In order to comply with these requirements, Bio Recycling plans to build a storage lagoon, which would allow the company to continue to accept septage and biosolids year-round, but only apply them when crops can use them.

The storage lagoon

Bio Recycling has applied for permits from Mason County and the Department of Ecology's Dam Safety Office to construct the lagoon, along with requesting approval under the biosolids permit to allow for storage of the liquid.

In order to be approved under the Biosolids General permit, facilities must be in compliance with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and all other permits. The SEPA process is meant to evaluate whether the construction of the facility will have a significant adverse impact on the environment.

Jointly, Mason County and Ecology evaluated the Environmental Checklist submitted by Bio Recycling and determined that the lagoon would not pose a significant adverse impact.

Mason County is currently holding a public comment period on this SEPA determination. The public comment period ends April 12. More information on this public comment period can be found at http://www.co.mason.wa.us/forms/Community_Dev/north-ranch-dns-notice-03292018.pdf.

If approved, Bio Recycling plans to build the lagoon this summer and have it in operation for the winter of 2018-19.

Other questions

What is the current permitting process and public comment period about?

Bio Recycling is seeking a grading permit from Mason County and a Dam Safety Construction Permit from the Department of Ecology, plus it is requesting a modification to its coverage under the State Biosolids General Permit for storing the liquid in the lagoon. Bio Recycling has already received coverage under the State Biosolids General Permit for the ability to receive, treat and land apply biosolids at its North Ranch site.

What about tests finding pharmaceuticals and other chemicals in groundwater on the site?

In late 2017, Bio Recycling tested two monitoring wells on its site for a number of common pharmaceuticals and chemicals found in personal care products, such as antibiotics, sunscreen and artificial sweeteners. This testing was done in response to questions from a neighboring property owner about water quality impacts.

Bio Recycling shared the test findings with Ecology. Ecology's biosolids staff discussed the test results with the other agency personnel and with the Washington State Department of Health. They determined that the test results were consistent with what we would expect, given the material Bio Recycling accepts, and that these levels do not pose a threat to human health.

Pharmaceuticals and other household chemicals end up in wastewater through toilets, showers and sinks. As the ability to detect various chemicals has improved, it is now possible to detect them in trace amounts. Trace amounts of pharmaceuticals and other chemicals of concern have been detected in Washington's surface water, groundwater, wastewater, reclaimed water, and sediments.

How has Ecology informed the public about this process?

Ecology has participated in three public meetings to discuss the North Ranch site: In June 2016, Ecology staff met with members of the Hood Canal Improvement Club to discuss water quality concerns at the site; in March 2017, Ecology held a public meeting and hearing on Bio Recycling's application for coverage under the Biosolids General Permit; and in September 2017, Ecology staff presented information on the biosolids permitting process to the Mason County Planning Commission.

Ecology received 17 comments on Bio Recycling's application for coverage, including comments from the Hood Canal Improvement Club, the Sierra Club, neighbors, and local septic companies. Ecology used the information in these comments in determining what additional requirements to place on Bio Recycling's application for coverage.

You can read Ecology's Response to Comments and Final Coverage Letter at:

- <https://ecology.wa.gov/Asset-Collections/Doc-Assets/Reducing-and-recycling/Organic-materials/BioRecyclingfinalcoverageletter12-2017>
- <https://ecology.wa.gov/Asset-Collections/Doc-Assets/Reducing-and-recycling/Organic-materials/BioRecyclingresponsetocomments12-2017>

Will Bio Recycling store raw sewage in the lagoon?

No. Bio Recycling will treat all of the material it accepts prior to storing it in the lagoon. This process includes treating the material with lime to kill pathogens and control odors, and separating liquids from solids, so that the material going into the lagoon contains less than 0.5 percent solids.

What about odors from the lagoon?

Ecology does not expect odor issues stemming from the lagoon. Before being stored in the lagoon, the material will be treated to reduce pathogens, and solids and liquids will be separated, meaning the remaining liquid going into the lagoon will contain less than 0.5 percent solids. However, if necessary, Bio Recycling will be required to submit an odor management plan to Ecology explaining how the company will improve its odor control.

Who can I talk to at Ecology about the North Ranch site?

- Kelsey Dunne, Ecology Southwest Region Biosolids Coordinator, 360-407-6055, kdun461@ecy.wa.gov
- Peter Lyon, Ecology Southwest Region Section Manager, Waste 2 Resources, 360-407-6381, plyo461@ecy.wa.gov.
- For general information on biosolids permitting, please visit www.ecology.wa.gov/biosolids.

Thank you for your interest in this permitting process.

Sincerely,



Peter Y. Lyon
Regional Section Manager
Waste 2 Resources Program