

**CITY OF SUMAS
SHORELINE MASTER PROGRAM UPDATE**

***STRATEGY FOR SHORELINE USES, PUBLIC ACCESS,
RESOURCE PROTECTION AND RESTORATION***

TASK 3.1

December 31, 2010

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Introduction

The City of Sumas is in the process of updating its Shoreline Management Master Program consistent with the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) Guidelines, WAC 173-26. This Strategy for Shoreline Uses, Public Access, Resource Protection and Restoration (Strategy) has been prepared and funded through a grant from Ecology—specifically, under Grant No. G1000056, Task 3.1. The development of this Strategy relied on a Community Visioning process that included: 1) Review of the existing Sumas Shoreline Management Master Program adopted in 1999; and 2) Input from elected officials and the public. A Community Visioning Meeting was held on December 13, 2010 following notification in the Lynden Tribune on December 1, 2010 and in the City newsletter e-mailed on December 1, 2010. At the Visioning Meeting, City staff introduced the shoreline update process, identified the areas located within shoreline jurisdiction in the City of Sumas, and provided examples of shoreline problems and opportunities, as well as staff-generated ideas addressing future shoreline uses, public access, resource protection and restoration. Following this introduction, input was received from the Sumas Mayor, City Council and Planning Commission and from the public in the form of questions or suggestions applicable to the visioning process.

Shoreline Jurisdictional Areas

The City of Sumas and its designated urban growth area include segments of two shoreline streams: the Sumas River and Johnson Creek. The Sumas River forms a portion of the eastern boundary of the City and Johnson Creek flows through the industrial district and the downtown core area of the City before joining the Sumas River near the eastern City limits. Both streams flow through relatively flat areas. In addition to these two shoreline streams, wetland areas associated with Bone Creek and Sumas Creek are also recognized as being within shoreline jurisdiction based on their being located in the 100-year floodplain and hydrologically connected to either Johnson Creek or the Sumas River.

General Strategy

The current Sumas Shoreline Management Master Program was developed in 1997-1999 and was approved by Ecology on April 12, 1999. In general the existing Master Program has worked very well and the City is satisfied that it fairly well reflects the ongoing vision of the citizens of the City of Sumas. On this basis, the City's general strategy for completing the required update of the Master Program is to build upon the existing Master Program and retain the great majority of its essential provisions. This approach is

based in part on the relatively recent timeframe within which the existing Master Program was developed and the substantial public involvement that went into its development and adoption.

Shoreline Uses

None of the shoreline water bodies in Sumas are seen as being navigable waters, and none is able to support water-dependent or water-related industrial or commercial uses. It is anticipated that the current pattern of shoreline uses will continue and will, therefore, be reflected in the new Master Program. The current pattern of uses shows a predominance of industrial development in the areas adjacent to Johnson Creek west of the Burlington-Northern railway line, commercial and densely developed residential areas located adjacent to Johnson Creek to the east of the railway line, and medium- and high-density residential development located adjacent to the Sumas River.

Public Access

Public access to shoreline areas in Sumas is limited by a number of factors. First, all of the shoreline water bodies are relatively narrow and therefore do not support a wide variety of public access uses. Second, a larger percentage of shoreline area is located in the Industrial District where public access may not be appropriate. Third, naturally-occurring asbestos found in sediment carried into the Sumas River from Swift Creek severely limits use of the immediate riparian area adjacent to the Sumas River due to the risk of exposure to this potentially toxic material. The major public access locations in Sumas include the City Park located adjacent to Johnson Creek in the downtown area and the new ball fields, which are located in the vicinity of Bone Creek. Limited visual public access to shoreline areas in Sumas is provided and will continue to be provided by road crossings and street ends. Some additional public access to Johnson Creek may be possible through the development of a planned trail system.

Resource Protection

The primary mechanism for protecting shoreline resources is the establishment and maintenance of relatively large Conservancy buffers adjacent to the westernmost reaches of Johnson Creek. A system of variable buffers through the developed portions of the downtown area allow high value areas to be protected while not unduly limiting continued use of already developed areas. The requirement that new development provide treatment of stormwater will also help protect shoreline resources.

One issue of particular importance to the citizens of Sumas is the need to be able to keep the shoreline waterways clear of obstructions such as excess sediment, debris and invasive species such as reed canarygrass. Keeping these waterways clear is important not only to protect ecological functions but also to protect private property by reducing risks posed by flooding. The Sumas Strategy is to try to strike a reasonable balance between these sometimes competing public benefits of resource protection and flood risk mitigation. For example, in some instances it may be inappropriate to invest in major re-

planting of riparian areas immediately adjacent to shoreline streams if these plantings are likely to create obstructions to the flow of flood waters.

Restoration

A large portion of the native vegetation along the Sumas River and Johnson Creek has been removed through previous actions and/or replaced by invasive species. This situation provides an excellent opportunity to support substantial restoration efforts. The presence of Swift Creek sediment will likely limit opportunities to enhance the shoreline area immediately adjacent to the Sumas River. Recent projects to clear invasive species and replant native vegetation along Johnson Creek have taken place as mitigation associated with development. It is anticipated that this approach will continue into the future.