



# Whose Shore?

## Assessing the Effects of Public Participation on Shoreline Master Program Updates in Puget Sound

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# Background: Shoreline Pressures



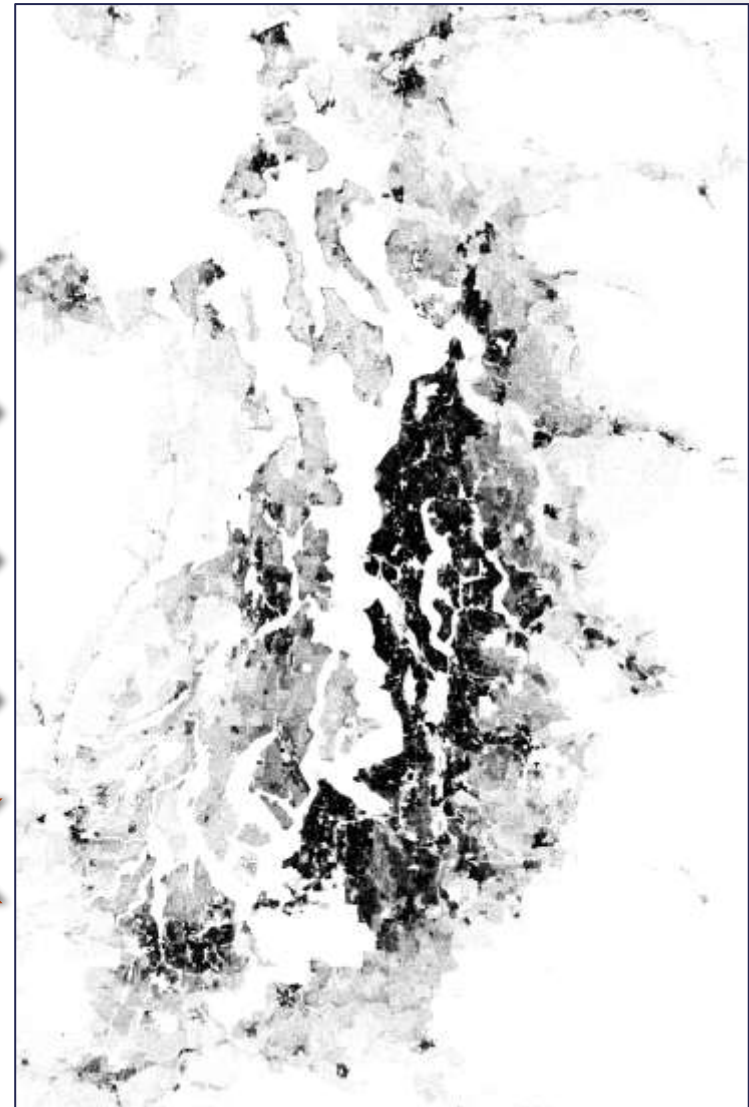
Housing

Industry

Recreation

Trade

Ecology?

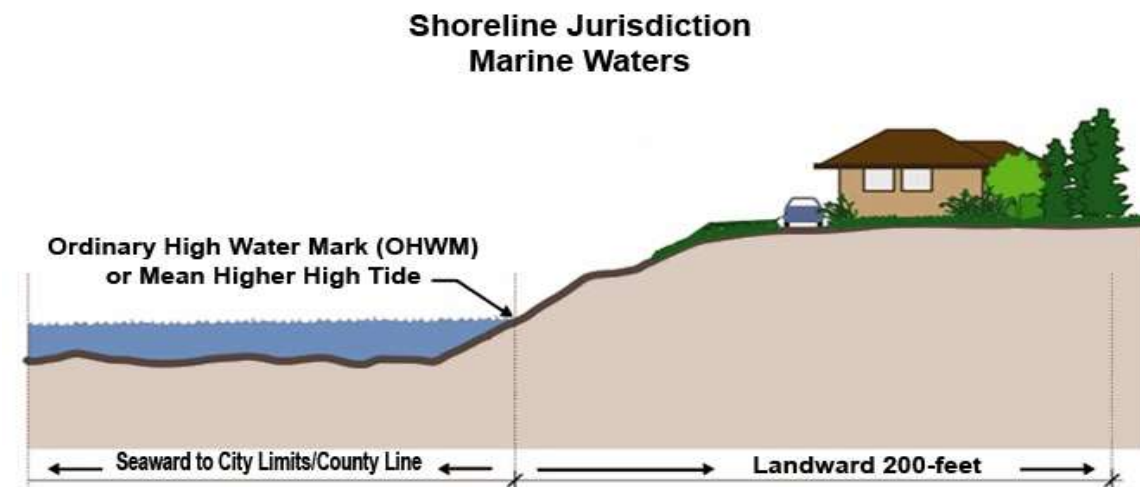


Puget Sound, 1867 Coastal Survey Map

Puget Sound, 2010 Census

## Background: SMA & SMP Updates

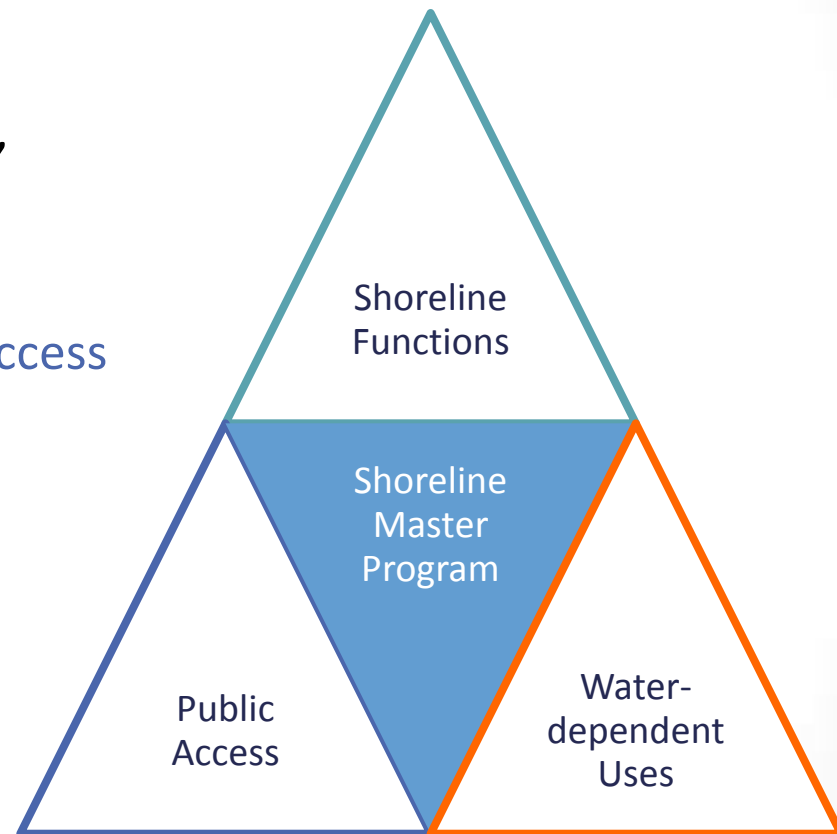
- 1971-72, Voters approve Shoreline Management Act
  - Concerns 200 feet landward of the Ordinary High Water Mark
  - Emphasizes statewide over local interests
  - Requires both local and state approval
- 2003, New Guidelines require 260 SMPs updated by 2014
  - Requires inventory and characterization of shoreline
  - New guidelines for “no net loss” standard
  - Must include a Public Participation plan



# Background: SMA & SMP Updates

State guidelines (WAC 173-26) outline three overarching policy goals:

- Allow economically productive, **water-dependent** uses
- Preserve and enhance **public access** and recreation use
- Protect and restore the **ecological functions** of natural shorelines



# Background: Public Participation

## Spectrum of Public Participation

COMPLY

INFORM

CONSULT

EDUCATE

INVOLVE

COLLABORATE

EMPOWER

What makes a process more participatory?  
(Dietz and Stern 2008)

- Breadth of representation
- Intensity of involvement
- Timing of participation
- Inclusiveness of the methods used
- Influence of the input generated



Image: Washington Department of Ecology



## Questions:

- How much variation is there in public participation across jurisdictions?
- How well do updated SMPs incorporate public values expressed through the public participation process?



## Methods:

- Content Analysis
  - Public participation plans
  - Draft and final SMPs
  - Public comments
- Interviews
  - Planners, environmental groups, port and business interests, recreational users



# Research Design & Methods

## Study Sample:

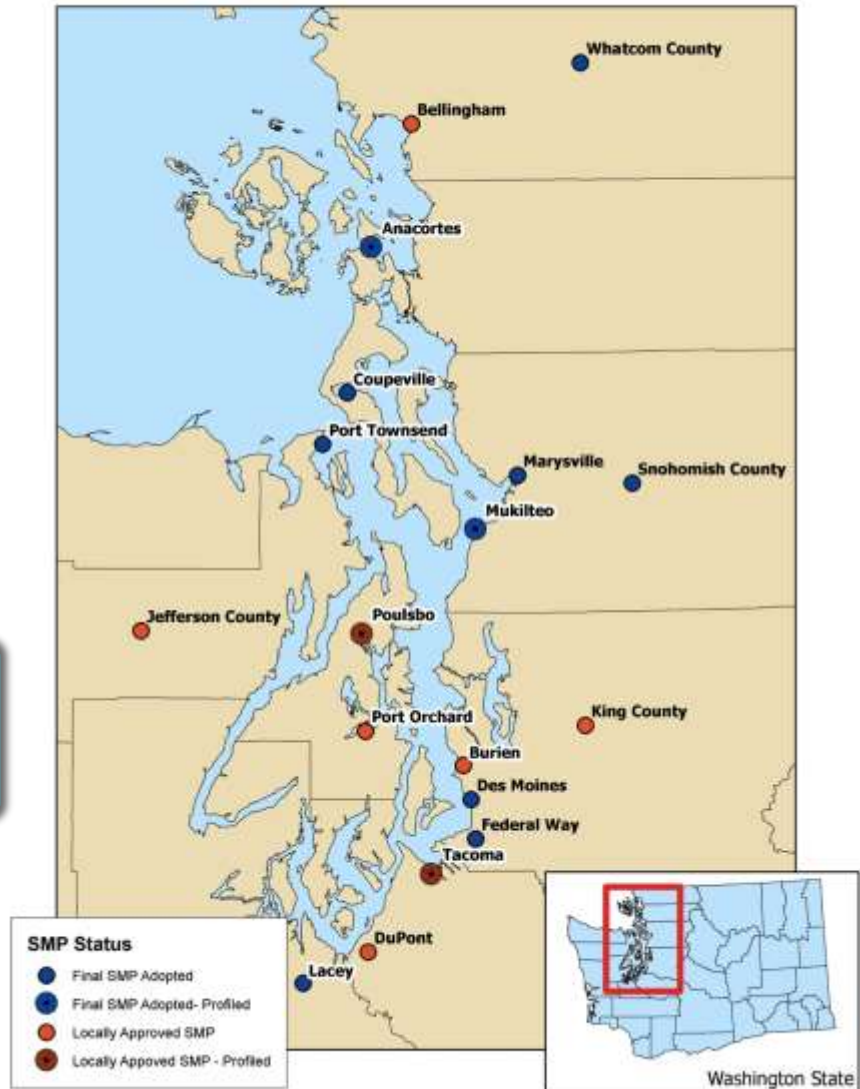
All Puget Sound jurisdictions with a Participation plan (46)

Locally approved draft plan, December 2012 (23)

State approved final plan, December 2012 (10)

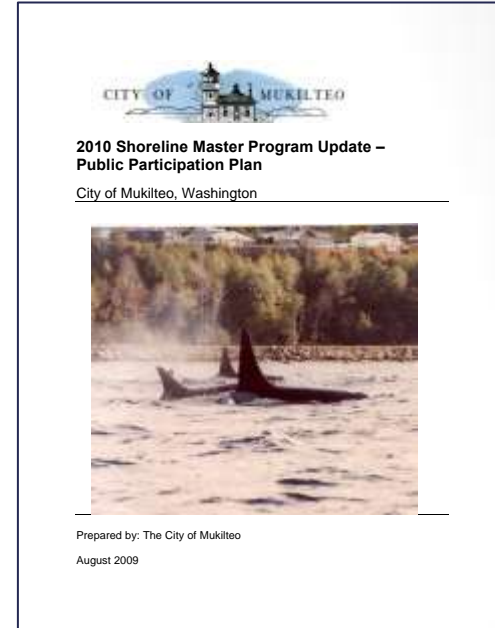
Case studies (4)

### Puget Sound SMP Study Locations



# Analysis: Public Participation Plans

- Participation Objectives
  - Average: 4 out of 7
  - Most common – Involve
  - Least common – Educate
- Groups Targeted for Participation
  - Average: 31 (Range: 12-129)
    - Government (federal, state, or local) 90%
    - Property owners 87%
    - Tribes 84%
    - Businesses 71%
    - Environmental interests 66%
    - Recreational users 34%





# Analysis: Public Participation Plans

- Timing of Participation
  - Majority plan to involve public relatively early, before a draft
- Methods of Participation
  - Average number of formats: 14 (Range: 3-22)
    - Inform (ex. website): 8
    - Consult (ex. comment): 4
    - Involve (ex. workshop): 2
    - Collaborate (ex. advisory group): 1
- Common Methods
  - Website 89%
  - Public meetings 76%
  - Open house 66%

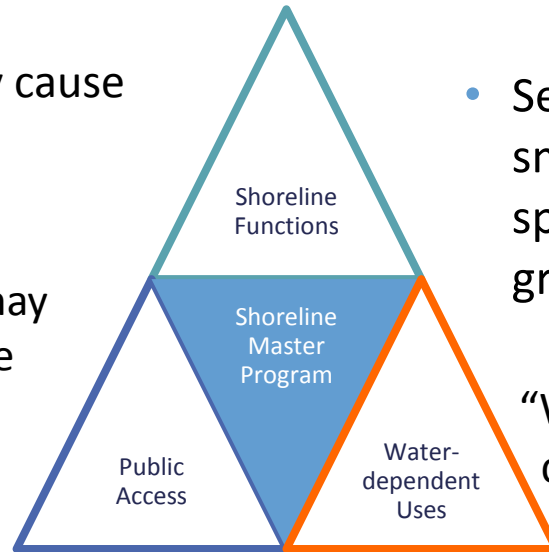


# Analysis: Case Studies & Interviews

## Shoreline function vs. Public access

- Waterfront trails may cause damage to shoreline

“There are supposedly vegetation pockets that may hold a tree or two, but the portions of the trail they developed is an asphalt non-pervious surface.”



## Shoreline function vs. Water-dependent uses

- Setbacks and buffers too small/too big; encourages sprawl/discourages economic growth

“We are concerned the SMP as currently written could preclude future Port development...”

## Public access vs. Water-dependent uses

- New or expanded public access requirements seen as threatening to existing industrial uses

“Why can’t our city have a beautiful waterfront like most other progressive cities have?”

# Analysis: Case Studies & Interviews

## Challenges for Planners

- Long, Complicated Process
- Limited Funding, Resources, Staff Experience
- Turnover: staff turnover, participant turnover, political turnover
- Explaining the Limits of Public Input
- “Not a Sexy Topic”
- Usual Suspects

Conflict between plan as **vision** and plan as **blueprint**



# Analysis: Case Studies & Interviews

## What Worked **Well**?

- Having multiple methods of public participation
- Proactive outreach with key groups
- Having a point staff person, and a core group who sticks with the process throughout
- Topical meetings, rather than broad
- Making documents accessible and searchable
- Sharing resources of other community groups

## What **Did Not** Work Well?

- Underestimating understanding of current land-use practices
- What happens to public input? Black Hole
- Timing and site selection of meetings
- Limited use of mass and social media
- Isolating SMP from other processes



# Conclusions & Recommendations

Local governments go beyond minimum participation requirements, but there is room for improvement.

- If you use the **usual methods**, you'll get the **usual suspects**
  - 11% of Americans regularly attend public meetings; 48% have never attended one
- Understand, and communicate, role of participation
- Go where they are
  - Shoreline parks, waterfront festivals, online
- Don't start from scratch, Don't go it alone
  - For community groups – what do you have to offer?
- Make use of public input **visible**, traceable





# Questions?



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