

BENTON COUNTY SMP UPDATE OPEN HOUSE EVENTS



Community Questionnaire & Open House Meeting Summary, April 11, 2013

Prepared by BERK and The Watershed Company, May 2 2013

To help Benton County consider the long-term vision for its Yakima and Columbia River shorelines and its Shoreline Master Program (SMP) Update, Benton County issued a web-based Community Questionnaire on Survey Monkey mid-March 2013.

The questionnaire asked questions about:

- Current shoreline use
- Desired future use
- Physical and Visual Access
- Preservation and restoration options and tools

The results of the survey are attached.

Benton County advertised the questionnaire in a display ad in the Tri-City Herald, a postcard to a mailing list of shoreline property owners, and an email flier to persons interested in planning and the SMP in Benton County. After approximately 3 weeks, the County closed the questionnaire on March 31, 2013. The County received 132 responses. Benton County hosted an open house to share the results of the Community Questionnaire on April 11, 2013. Fifteen members of the public attended, as well as two Shoreline Advisory Committee members. This document summarizes the comments made at the Open House.



GENERAL QUESTIONS

Questions regarding the 200-foot Shoreline Jurisdiction:

- Is that more than it was previously?
- How are we going to measure it? Historically the “height of the tree” is what determined the 200ft.
- 200ft is not a setback, correct?
- What is the setback now? 100ft?
 - **Response:** The shoreline jurisdiction is generally 200 feet from the ordinary high water mark, and has not changed since development of the County’s 1974 SMP. Shoreline jurisdiction refers to the applicable area of the SMP (management area). Through the SMP update, setbacks or buffers would be developed based on current, existing conditions. We will also consider Benton County’s critical areas regulations. The current critical area code setback is generally 100 feet, except along certain steep slopes.

FEEDBACK FOLLOWING REVEAL OF SURVEY RESULTS:

Comments & Questions

- **Comment:** “If you are saying the river shoreline is our identity, then first impressions matter. How do the dilapidated trailers and other garbage along the rivers reflect us? We need just enforcement of junked cars that are on properties along the river.”

Public Access

- “Who will provide public access? Will private landowners be required to provide access on their land?”
- “Sounds like you are allowing public access on private lands.”
- “What are private land owners obligated to do?”
 - **Response:** The goal and preferences of the SAC members are to provide public access on public lands. Public access on public lands is a priority in the Shoreline Management Act as well. Please note the State Department of Ecology rules for SMP’s (WAC 173-26) also indicate that new development that creates a demand for public access should provide for public access, such as new subdivisions providing a trail to the shoreline. Public access is not required for existing homes or existing businesses.
- “Do you have enough ‘public property’ to create trails?”
- “It is a balancing act of use versus impact”
- “Ad hoc public access is a community and environmental problem; the County should purchase land to create designated public access new Twin Bridges”
- “We might all want public access but are we willing to pay for it? i.e. property taxes increased?”

Restoration

- “What is the Restoration Plan? What does it do?”
 - **Response:**
 - It is separate from the regulations
 - It is completely voluntary
 - It brings all the restoration efforts happening in the County into one document
- “Can you give us an example of restoration?”
- “Will the plan tell us what species to plant?”
 - **Response:** The County’s website already has some information on this topic.
 - “What are the local ‘noxious’ weeds?”
 - “What do you do if you see a safety issue or pollution problem?” (Scott Revell gave examples of places to call that are referenced on the KID website)

“No net ecological loss”

- “Who decides if there is no net loss?”

- **Response:** The SMP regulations will be designed on a County-wide scale to result in no net loss of ecological function, and we'll be required to "show our work" to the Washington Department of Ecology in a Cumulative Impacts Analysis.
- "An EIS costs thousands of dollars; I don't think individual property owners should have to pay for that."
 - **Response:** We're looking to limit the personal/private obligations for studies. One exception would be for "conditional use" applications.
- "Who will enforce this?"
 - **Response:** The County will enforce the SMP. Every 8 years, the County will evaluate the effectiveness of the policies of the SMP and revise the SMP as needed.

Program Intent and Policy Direction

- "Has there been a change in direction?"
- "What are the changes between the 1974 plan and now?"
 - **Response:**
 - River flows have been altered and improved.
 - There are more homes.
 - In the Shoreline Management Act and Washington State Department of Ecology SMP Guidelines (WAC 173-26), there is an increased focus on habitat protection and restoration, more emphasis on biological health.
 - The listing of some species of salmon on the Endangered Species Act has increased regulatory complexity.
 - There is more attention and regulation on shoreline stabilization.

Setbacks

- "What is the 100 foot setback?"
 - **Response:** The 100-foot setback is a standard in the Benton County critical areas code. The setback requirement will be reconsidered as part of this process. Through the SMP update, setbacks or buffers would be developed based on current, existing conditions. We will also consider Benton County's critical areas regulations.