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GRAYS HARBOR COUNTY

STATE OF WASHINGTON

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Grays Harbor County's Pacific Coast Shellfish Protection District

What is this about?

The Washington State Department of Health Office of Shellfish and Water Protection (DOH) is responsible for providing sanitary control of molluscan shellfish (oysters, clams, and mussels). The program works closely with tribes, local health jurisdictions, volunteer groups, state and federal agencies and the shellfish industry. A key component of this program is Growing Area Classification. Sanitary Surveys are conducted in commercial and recreational growing areas to determine their suitability for shellfish harvest. The surveys include water quality monitoring and pollution source evaluations of the surrounding areas. There are about 100 commercial growing areas and 250 recreational beaches currently classified.

In Grays Harbor County there are two (2) Classified Growing Areas, **1) Grays Harbor (The Bay) and 2) Pacific Coast (North Beach)**. Multiple Water Quality (WQ) monitoring stations along the Pacific Coast growing area have exceeded National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) Standards. When these standards are exceeded and non-point sources of fecal loading are the principle contributors to water quality degradation, Washington State Law mandates the creation of a Shellfish Protection District (SPD) per RCW 90.72. The intent of this statute is to identify the areas contributing to fecal loading and implement actions deemed necessary to protect public health and ensure the continued viability of shellfish beds. A SPD is a geographic area designated by a county to restore and protect water quality and tideland resources. Locally, recreational and commercial razor clam harvest protection is vital to the local and state economy.

The South Beach area (Westport/Grayland etc) is not currently included in the states shellfish program as it has little, fresh water drainages discharging directly onto the razor clam beds. Freshets/drainages etc are the most common conduits by which fecal pollution is deposited onto the beds.

Why create a Shellfish Protection District?

The Washington State Department of Health Office of Shellfish and Water Protection (DOH) notified our office that the classification for a portion of the Pacific Coast Growing Area was downgraded from **Approved** to **Conditionally Approved** effective August 18, 2011. Per RCW 90.72.045 that action necessitates the creation of a SPD. Specifically, the affected stations are located in and around Pacific Beach and Moclips at WQ Stations 11, 195, and 197 (these are the orange/yellow areas on the maps).

More recently, sample results at WQ Station #9 near the Oyehut Beach Approach off of Damon Road (Just north of Ocean Shores) have raised concerns. The State Department of Health is still evaluating the data and additional testing is required, but it likely this area will exceed National Shellfish Sanitation Program standards. Therefore we are proposing two initial options for district boundaries. See the main webpage for additional information on these two options.

A shellfish protection district gives counties:

- Authority to establish and fund programs to protect and restore water quality in valuable shellfish growing areas.
- Flexibility to determine district boundaries, program services, finance mechanisms and rate structures.
- Flexibility to tailor services to address local water quality needs, including storm water runoff, onsite sewage systems, farm animal wastes, boater wastes, water quality monitoring and public education.
- Flexibility to finance district services with local tax revenues, rates, charges, fees and public and private grants and loans.

Shellfish Protection Districts already exist in at least nine other areas of Western Washington. Examples include districts in Clallam, Kitsap, Pierce, Mason, Whatcom and Skagit counties. Although the State is mandating that Grays Harbor County create a district, many of the details are up to us, collectively, to decide. Your input can help determine:

Boundaries

Which geographic areas should be included in the district.

Programs

What type of programs and activities should be taken to manage the problem.

Funding

How to fund the needed work.

Currently, the Grays Harbor County Environmental Health Division (EHD) is advocating for inclusion of the entire Pacific Coast Growing area in the district, but breaking the area up into three sections (north, central and south). This will allow us to focus appropriate responses given the different water quality issues that expand over this large stretch of coastline. Click the link below each option (map) on the SPD website for additional explanation. The Response Plan itself describes the 3 areas in greater detail.

In Summary

Right now, the downgrades in Pacific Beach and Moclips are “seasonally” conditioned meaning they are only restricted during the warm summer months, (WQ monitoring indicates the highest fecal bacteria counts in June, July and August). Because this is outside of the razor clam digging season, there is no immediate impact to harvesting. However, WQ station #9 is on the verge of exceeding NSSP standards. This station is just north of Ocean Shores (approximately 15 miles south of the downgrades in Pacific Beach). Because of these facts we are advocating for the inclusion of the entire growing area into the district with the caveat that we focus efforts on areas around the impaired WQ stations (in Pacific Beach, Moclips and WQ station 9). We intend to utilize existing resources to initiate response work (source investigation) until additional funding can be secured.