

--Message Points--
Skagit Land Trust Proposed Amendments - County Critical Areas
Ordinance
Great Blue Heron Protections

Skagit County Planning Commission Public Hearing
January 21, 2020
6:00 p.m., Commissioners Hearing Room
1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon, WA

Take Action to protect Great Blue Herons in Skagit County

(Information: www.skagitlandtrust.org/Action)

Attend the hearing and/or submit written comments

We need as many supporters as possible to attend the hearing, even if you do not wish to speak. Thank you!

HOW TO COMMENT (Message Points below):

1) Speak at the hearing: The Planning Commission allows just two - three minutes per person for spoken comments. Please practice your comments to assure you can state your points within the allotted time.

2) Written comments: Your full comments in written form are also encouraged. You can turn them in during the public hearing. If you aren't able to attend the hearing, you can email, slow mail, or hand deliver them. Deadline is January 24, 2020, 4:30 p.m.

The following instructions are from Planning & Development Services:

(When submitting written comments), email comments are preferred and must be sent to pdscomments@co.skagit.wa.us with the proposal name ("Skagit County's 2019 Docket of Proposed Policy, Code, and Map Amendments") in the subject line. Include your comments in the body of your email message rather than as attachments.

Regular mail or hand delivered:

Paper comments must be printed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper and mailed or delivered to:

"Skagit County's 2019 Docket of Proposed Policy, Code, and Map Amendments"

Planning and Development Services

1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon WA 98273

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BACKGROUND

Skagit Land Trust (SLT) has proposed an update to Skagit County's Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) to protect Great Blue Herons – an iconic local species with a unique presence in the County. SLT is concerned that without articulated, clearer protections included in the Skagit County CAO this charismatic and much-loved bird could face an uncertain future in the County. It is of great concern that the second largest and the oldest heronry in Skagit County, on Samish Island, was abandoned partway through the nesting season in 2017. Although the exact cause of the abandonment is not known for certain, we do know that heronries are vulnerable to many types of human disturbance.

Skagit Land Trust recommends the County adopt P-4, Skagit Land Trust's proposed amendment. This amendment is informed by the Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) Management Recommendations for Great Blue Herons and also considers conditions unique to Skagit County. Adopting this, will strengthen the Critical Areas Ordinance protections of Great Blue Herons.

Skagit County has several important Great Blue Heron colonies, including:

- Barney Lake
- Samish Island mega-colony with over 200 nests which was abandoned in June, 2017.
- March Point Heronry, the remaining significant mega-colony with over 700 nests.

MESSAGE POINTS: (You will have 2 - 3 minutes. It's a good idea to practice!)
Introduce yourself. Briefly describe in your own words why Great Blue Herons are important to you and why you want to see their nesting areas protected in Skagit County. It is fine to simply say you want the Planning Commission to recommend that the County adopt P-4, Skagit Land Trust's proposed amendment. However, if you would like to write a more in-depth comment, we have provided message points below. Select one or two. You can also elaborate with your own thoughts and ideas.

- **The County has four options. Please state that you recommend that Skagit County adopt Skagit Land Trust's P-4 amendment over the other options.**
- The best available science should include local knowledge. Skagit Land Trust has over 20 years of stewarding and observing the March Point and Samish Island heronries. Data has been recorded throughout the breeding and nesting seasons. Currently the Trust submits requested information to Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW.) I support Skagit Land Trust's P-4 proposal that is based on the best available science and decades of local knowledge.

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- I support both year-round and seasonal buffers as recommended by WDFW. In particular, colonies like March Point that exhibit behavior indicative of a low tolerance to people should be assigned the largest buffer possible. March Point, as a mega-colony of international significance, should receive this level of protection.
- During the breeding and nesting season Great Blue Herons are very sensitive to human activities. They are known to have abandoned nesting sites in response to unusual disturbances like noises and lights. Our current County code has minimal guidance on how to protect Great Blue Heron nesting sites from human disturbances. Therefore, I fully support the inclusion of SLT's P-4 amendment into our County Critical Area Ordinance because it clearly details how to protect heronries.
- With well over 700 nests, the March Point mega-colony heronry is the largest in the Salish Sea region and one of the largest on the entire west coast of the United States. Expanded protections with year-round and seasonal buffers are essential because we know we cannot take the existence of these mega-colonies for granted. In 2017, the second largest heronry on Samish Island was abandoned. According to WDFW guidelines, this heronry must be protected for ten years in case herons return. The Barney Lake heronry currently has over 20 nests and must also be protected. I urge the Planning Commission to recommend adoption of Skagit Land Trust's P-4 amendments to the County Critical Areas Ordinance to protect herons now and into the future.
- Skagit Land Trust's proposal will protect the forests that contain nest trees from encroaching development and establish buffers to protect herons from disturbances throughout the breeding and nesting season. I support these expanded protections and ask that the Planning Commission recommend that the County Commissioners adopt Skagit Land Trust's P-4 amendment as part of our county CAO.