

Q&A Factsheet: South Port Townsend Bay (SPTB)

Q. What is the issue and goal in South Port Townsend Bay?

A. The issue is the threat of closure of shellfish harvesting in SPTB because of too many boats anchored or moored near shellfish beds. The goal is to develop a management plan that will avoid closure of SPTB to shellfish harvesting. The management plan must consider all uses in the bay and include a long-term approach for the whole bay that allows sustainable coexistence of commercial shellfish operations, boat moorage, and other appropriate uses.

Q. Why the concern about shellfish safety?

A. Shellfish (oysters, clams and mussels) feed by filtering the water in which they live. One oyster can filter 50 gallons in a day. These animals ingest and concentrate whatever is in the water, which can include bacteria and viruses when they are present. Because people often eat shellfish raw or lightly cooked, shellfish harvested from polluted areas can be hazardous to eat. Because of these factors, shellfish are a highly regulated food.

Q. Why are we protecting commercial shellfish operations in SPTB?

A. SPTB shellfish operations are important to Jefferson County's economy and the bay's ecology. Environmentally, shellfish are a key species that graze down phytoplankton as they eat, keeping marine waters clean.

Q. What is the concern about boat discharges?

A. There are two concerns. (1) Septic or other discharges from boats (intentional or unintentional) can concentrate in shellfish and, if ingested, make people ill. The more boats present, the higher the likelihood of discharges occurring. (2) Like all shellfish-producing states, Washington must comply with the shellfish growing water standards of the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP), as established by the US Food and Drug Administration, and administered here by the Department of Health (DOH).

Under the NSSP a "marina" is defined as any water area that is used for temporary or permanent docking or mooring for more than 10 boats. When an area meets this threshold, the DOH is required to develop a management plan to assure that shellfish in the area or adjacent to it are

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safe for consumption. The plan can include permanent or temporary closures and other protective measures.

Q. Why are the Tribes concerned about SPTB?

A. Historically, Tribes have harvested shellfish for ceremonial, subsistence, and trade purposes. Commercial shellfish harvesting continues to be an important source of income for many Tribal citizens. Closures due to pollution or other environmental degradation are a direct impact to the Tribes' ability to access shellfish beds and violate their treaty rights. Treaty Tribes are also co-managers of fish and shellfish resources, along with the State of Washington. One of these co-management responsibilities is to ensure that shellfish harvested is safe for human consumption by following the NSSP guidelines.

Q. Water quality results have been fine. Why close the shellfish beds?

A. NSSP determines health risks by the number and location of boats, not water sample results. This is because marine toilets, as opposed to septic systems, provide only limited or no treatment and the discharge can reach shellfish quickly and with little dilution. Because the discharges are sporadic, water samples rarely capture boating waste, especially considering that marine water is sampled in some areas only once every 60 days.

Q. Does SPTB meet the NSSP definition of a marina?

A. DOH has determined the Hadlock Marina and the mooring field in front of it (partly occupied by the Port Hadlock Yacht Club) meet the NSSP definition of a marina. NOTE - DOH counts only boats that can accommodate a marine toilet. A Prohibited marina closure zone to cover the Port Hadlock Yacht Club and nearby boats will be one outcome of the management plan process. However, a desired outcome of this process is that this Prohibited zone not encroach on existing commercial shellfish beds.

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Q. How many buoys/vessels are in SPTB? How many of these uses are authorized?

A. When the stakeholder process first started, there were 68 moorage structures in SPTB. 26 of these (38% of the original total) have left the area as of June 2012. Of the remainder, 15 are authorized and 27 are unauthorized. Only a handful of vessels (all currently unauthorized) need to be relocated in order for the existing commercial shellfish beds to remain open.

Q. What authorizations are necessary in order to have a fully legal mooring buoy in SPTB?

A. The DNR requires either a registration, a license or a lease depending on individual factors. Jefferson County requires a shoreline development permit or exemption. WDFW requires a Hydraulic Project Approval. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers automatically covers permitting of mooring buoys under Nation Wide Permit 10 if the use meets the terms and conditions covered by that general authorization.