

Leque Island Alternatives Analysis Project Stakeholder Engagement and Public Outreach

SUMMARY OF INPUT

April 20, 2015

I. OVERVIEW OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC OUTREACH PROCESS

A robust Communications and Decision Plan¹ was developed and implemented for the Leque Island Alternatives Analysis project. In addition to providing an opportunity for stakeholders and the public to provide input at key junctures throughout the project, the Communications and Decision Plan enabled the core project team to raise the overall level of understanding among citizens and stakeholders about the major drivers for the project. Ultimately, the communications and outreach activities undertaken resulted in a broad coalition of support from diverse stakeholders for the process used by WDFW to determine the preferred path forward. Equally importantly, input provided by stakeholders and the public helped inform WDFW's selection of the preferred alternative for Leque Island.

Key aspects of the two major elements of the communications and outreach effort – stakeholder engagement and public outreach/involvement – are included in the following sections.

Stakeholder engagement

Represented interests

A 30-member Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) was formed at the outset of the project to provide input to WDFW as it worked to develop alternatives for addressing issues related to dike failures on Leque Island. SAC members were invited to participate in the process via two avenues. First, via a survey that was distributed at the first of two public meetings held for the project on October 30, 2013. Second, via an email that was distributed to a comprehensive list of Leque Island stakeholders. Stakeholders represented a wide range of interests (see Table 1) and entities (see Table 2), from duck hunters and researchers to government entities, non-profits, interested citizens and special districts.

**Table 1. Stakeholder Advisory Committee –
Interests Represented**

Represented Interests	
• Dog trainers	• Pheasant hunters

¹ http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/skagit/leque_island/CommunicationsDecisionPlan.pdf

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duck hunters • Fishermen/women • Groundwater protection • Hikers/walkers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photographers • Researchers • Wildlife viewers
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Table 2. Stakeholder Advisory Committee – Entities represented

Type	Name
Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven individuals
Committees and Planning Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stillaguamish Watershed Council • Snohomish MRC
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Stanwood • Puget Sound Partnership • Stillaguamish Tribe (staff) • Snohomish Co SWMM • Tulalip Tribes (staff)
Not-for-profits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ducks Unlimited • Pheasants Forever • Pilchuck Audubon • Skagit Audubon • WA Waterfowl Association
Special Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juniper Beach Water District • Stillaguamish Flood Control District
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends of Eide Road • University of Washington (faculty)

Members of the public also attended all three SAC meetings. Two additional entities were reflected in the public attendance (but did not have a formal seat on the SAC). These include the WA State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) and the Wild Fish Conservancy.

Input solicited

Stakeholders were asked to provide input on three specific topics, including:

1. Their values and visions regarding Leque Island, including their desires for future use of the island.
2. Their thoughts about screening criteria and “additional considerations” for selection of a preferred alternative.
3. Their opinion on which alternative should be selected.

Results of all stakeholder input are included in *Section II – Summary of Stakeholder Input*.

In order to solicit meaningful and informed input, the project team invested substantial time in educating SAC members about many of the technical issues involved in the alternatives analysis process, including but not limited to: the results and application of hydrodynamic modeling, the pros and cons of the various alternatives, and the limitations or “sideboards” surrounding WDFW’s selection process.

Committee meetings and other

A total of three SAC meetings were held at Stanwood Middle School and Library during a one-year period between January 2014 and January 2015. Meeting notes, including attendance lists, are included on the project website at:

http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/skagit/leque_island_project.php. In addition, individual meetings were held with targeted stakeholder groups that either 1) could not attend a scheduled SAC meeting, and/or 2) requested more in-depth interaction with project leads regarding a specific issue. These one-on-one meetings were held with the City of Stanwood, the Stillaguamish Flood Control District, Pilchuck Audubon, Friends of Eide Road, and the Juniper Beach Water District. At these meetings, WDFW provided additional background information, clarified project processes, and discussed technical reports generated by the project in more detail than at SAC meetings. WDFW also collected input from policy representatives of the Stillaguamish, Tulalip, Swinomish, Sauk Suiattle, and Upper Skagit Tribes in a government-government meeting on April 1, 2015.

Public Outreach and Involvement

In addition to soliciting input from the SAC, input was solicited from the general public via two public workshops, both of which were held at Stanwood Middle School. The first workshop was held on Oct. 30, 2013 and the second on Feb. 25, 2015.

At the first workshop, WDFW agency staff and Ducks Unlimited representatives provided background information on the project, an overview of the project's alternatives analysis and design process, and an expected timeline for drafting conceptual designs and selecting a preferred alternative. Participants were also invited to participate in the Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

At the second workshop, WDFW agency staff and Ducks Unlimited representatives presented the results of the alternatives analysis process, including information regarding the hydrodynamic modeling results. An overview of the stakeholder engagement process, including what input was provided and how it informed the project, was also provided. At this workshop, agency staff solicited additional input from the public, primarily regarding their values and vision for Leque Island and their desired future use.

A summary of input provided during these workshops is included in *Section III – Summary of Public Input*. Meeting notes for each public meeting can be found on the project website at: http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/skagit/leque_island_project.php.

II. SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER INPUT

As noted previously, SAC members were asked to provide input on three specific topics, including:

1. Their values and visions regarding Leque Island, including their desires for future use of the island.

2. Their thoughts about screening criteria and “additional considerations” for selection of a preferred alternative.
3. Their opinion on which alternative should be selected.

In general, SAC members placed a high value Leque Island. Stated reasons ranged from the wildlife (both fish and bird) benefits provided by the island, to opportunities it provides for recreational activities, including photography, hiking, hunting, and fishing. Public access was consistently pointed to as an important element moving forward, with many SAC members expressing concern that access would be more limited with many of the alternatives being proposed.

Highlights of SAC members’ input for each of the three topic areas is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Stakeholder Input

Input Sought	Description	Summary of Input	How input was used
Values/ Vision Exercise	<p>Committee members were asked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What they <u>value</u> about Leque Island • <u>How they use</u> the property currently • <u>How they’d like to use</u> it in the future 	<p><u>Values</u></p> <p>Committee members expressed a variety of values that they currently hold for Leque. Topping the list include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public access • Recreation – hiking/birding/ hunting/fishing/photography/ water access/boating • Habitat for migrating birds and other species • Salmon recovery • Outdoor educational opportunities <p><u>Current use</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birding • Photography • Hunting • Kayaking • River watching • Dog training • Research – groundwater, bird counts, interaction of nature and people <p><u>Future Use</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational opportunities • Walking/hiking/hunting • Hosting community events • Restoration (removing non-native vegetation) • Salmon rearing • Safety improvements (hunting/hiker issues) 	<p>Committee values and vision input was used to build “additional considerations” component of screening process. WDFW confirmed that a full range of design alternatives (from no restoration to full restoration) should be considered for analysis based on input.</p> <p>Specifically, the following values expressed by committee members were wrapped into the screening criteria and additional considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterfowl hunting opportunities and access • Pheasant hunting opportunity and access • Wildlife viewing/photography opportunity and access • Dog training • Boating/water access • Educational/research

Input Sought	Description	Summary of Input	How input was used
Screening Criteria and Additional Considerations	Committee members were asked to weigh in on draft screening criteria and additional considerations	Committee members were supportive of the screening criteria after getting a detailed overview and having specific questions addressed. Key input from committee included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sure to address visitor safety (hiking/hunting compatibility issues) • Replacement opportunities should be pursued if pheasant and walk-in waterfowl hunting is not compatible 	Based on input, the list was determined to be complete and committee input on values was wrapped into the “additional considerations” (see above).
Design Alternatives	Committee members were asked to weigh in on design alternatives via a survey distributed prior to the final public workshop.	Twenty-one of 30 committee members responded to the survey. Ranking results for design alternatives averaged among all respondents are as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Full restoration 2. Training dike 3. Setback dike 4. Levee Breach 5. Do nothing 6. No restoration See project webpage for comprehensive results.	Input from this survey informed WDFW’s selection of the preferred design alternative. Results of this survey were not the sole source of input that advised WDFW’s selection.

III. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT

As noted previously, the general public had two opportunities to provide input to the alternatives analysis project: at two public workshops held on 10-30-13 and 2-25-15.

In general, the public input reflected the input received during the SAC process. Members of the public expressed strong values for Leque Island, specifically, for the fish and wildlife populations that it supports, as well as the recreational opportunities it provides, including (but not limited to) hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, dog training and photography. Continued access to the island to support these activities was a recurring theme at the meetings.

A summary of input received during these meetings appears in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Public Input

Input Sought	Description	Summary of Input	How input was used
Public Workshop #1 -	The public was asked: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How they use Leque Island currently 	Ten different uses were identified, including: (duck hunting, pheasant hunting, wildlife viewing/photography,	30 volunteers were invited to participate on the SAC; all ten uses

Input Sought	Description	Summary of Input	How input was used
Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If they would like to volunteer for the Stakeholder Advisory Committee 	fishing, walking, dog training, kayaking, drinking water source, research, and salmon habitat. 30 people volunteered for the SAC.	identified as important were represented.
Public Workshop #2 - Values/ Vision Exercise	<p>The public was asked (via a handwritten survey):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What they value about Leque Island How they use the property currently How they'd like to use it in the future 	<p>53 individuals attended the meeting. Attendees' interests largely mirrored those of SAC members and included public access, recreation (hiking/hunting/photography/fishing/birding), outdoor education, and dog training.</p> <p>The top five values were identified as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Habitat for migrating birds and other species Recreation – hiking/walking/birding Public access Recreation – hunting/fishing Recreation – photography <p>The top 5 future uses expressed were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Habitat for migrating birds/other species Habitat for salmon and Public access – tied for #2 Restoration Recreation – hiking/walking/birding 	Survey results were reviewed by the WDFW and DU Leque Island Project Team prior to recommendation of the preferred design alternative.
Public Workshop #2 - Breakout Tables	Attendees also had an opportunity to visit six different stations reflecting major project elements, including infrastructure changes; wildlife/habitat issues; results of modeling efforts; etc.	<p>Highlights of concerns and/or input table are listed below:</p> <p>Table 1 – Public Use/Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong sentiment that replacement lands should be sought if pheasant hunting opportunity is lost Concern that decision has already been made Suggestion to look at partnerships with land trusts/etc. in terms of protecting recreational access. <p>Table 2 – Fish and Wildlife</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No one expressed specific objections to any of the restoration options Most expressed concern with status quo continuing Most expressed preference for being able to continue birdwatching. Concern by duck and pheasant hunters – erosion of access in W WA in general; Leque yet another in a long 	Project team members who hosted stations debriefed and relayed input received at each station via a teleconference on March 3 rd , 2015. Notes from this teleconference are recorded and available upon request.

Input Sought	Description	Summary of Input	How input was used
		<p>line.</p> <p>Table 3 – Modeling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only concern expressed – desire to maintain drainage in Davis Slough on adjacent landowner property. <p>Table 4 – Screening Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People generally supportive of screening criteria selection and process • Duck hunter expressed strong value on upland habitat <p>Other input/concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juniper Beach Water District – strong concern expressed about potential saltwater intrusion in aquifers; expressed lack of confidence in EPA review of previous groundwater study. However, they also agreed that the process led by EPA reached its conclusion and do not fault DFW for adopting the conclusion in moving forward. • Need to consider long-term maintenance. Strong frustration expressed re: lack of maintenance landing DFW in current situation. 	

SECTION IV– SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS (1 page)

A robust Communications and Decision Plan² was developed and implemented for the Leque Island Alternatives Analysis project. In addition to providing an opportunity for stakeholders and the public to provide input at key junctures throughout the project, the Communications and Decision Plan enabled the core project team to raise the overall level of understanding among citizens and stakeholders about the major drivers for the project. Ultimately, the communications and outreach activities undertaken resulted in a broad coalition of support from diverse stakeholders for the process used by WDFW to determine the preferred path forward. Equally importantly, input provided by stakeholders and the public helped inform WDFW’s preferred alternative.

² http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/skagit/leque_island/CommunicationsDecisionPlan.pdf

Three stakeholder committee meetings occurred with strong participation from 30 committee members and 4 alternates. Meetings were a combination of education – ensuring that stakeholders had enough understanding of the various technical components of the project to provide meaningful input, and input – where committee members were asked targeted questions, both at meetings and via online surveys, at key junctures of the project. Input ranged from current values and future vision for Leque; to input and buy-in for the screening criteria process; to identifying preferred alternatives. At each stage, project team members incorporated committee feedback that in turn shaped the overall project.

Public outreach efforts were also robust, with two workshops and two surveys that captured broad input ranging from values and visions regarding Leque Island, to concerns about the various proposed alternatives. The values and visions expressed by attendees at the public workshops largely reflected those of the SAC members, which indicates that the stakeholder process succeeded in accomplishing one of its most important tasks: having the broader community represented within the committee structure. Two additional interests and concerns were captured via public outreach efforts that were not already captured in the stakeholder process – namely, ongoing concern regarding saltwater intrusion in aquifers.

APPENDICES

For access to each of these Appendix items, visit the project webpage at:
http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/skagit/leque_island_project.php

1. Leque Island Alternatives Analysis and Design Project – Communications and Decision Plan.
2. Meeting notes/attendee lists – 3 Stakeholder Committee Meetings
3. Meeting notes – Public Workshops
4. Survey results – Stakeholder Committee Design Ratings
5. Project Communications and Decision Table
6. Question and Answer Sheet