

An Empowering People in Communities Report

Empowering People in Communities (EPIC) worked in close collaboration with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) on a multi-year (2021-2023) project focused on inclusively engaging communities to better understand how Hilltop (Tacoma, WA) residents engage with and benefit from Puget Sound's natural environment. The project aimed to address the following objectives: (1) enhance knowledge of underrepresented communities' human wellbeing (HWB) in the Puget Sound region; (2) expand HWB Vital Signs data, information, and messaging; (3) build new community

The HWB Vital Signs are social indicators of Puget Sound's health and recovery. These indicators are monitored by the Puget Sound Partnership, a WA state agency, and its ecosystem recovery partners, including Oregon State University.

relationships for sustainable long-term collaboration; and (4) create a protocol detailing how the work, if successful, can be sustained with an agency, program, or other durable funding source. In order to accomplish these objectives, EPIC and WDFW co-developed the project using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach, which emphasizes close collaboration and co-creating knowledge together. The CBPR approach included co-created community workshops (n=52) and the implementation of a HWB survey (n=50). In this short report, we highlight selected findings from this project. The findings outlined in this report are intended to be informative and can be used to help understand the project, but potential connections among Hilltop residents and Puget Sound's natural environment, and how Puget Sound's environment contributes to Hilltop residents' HWB.

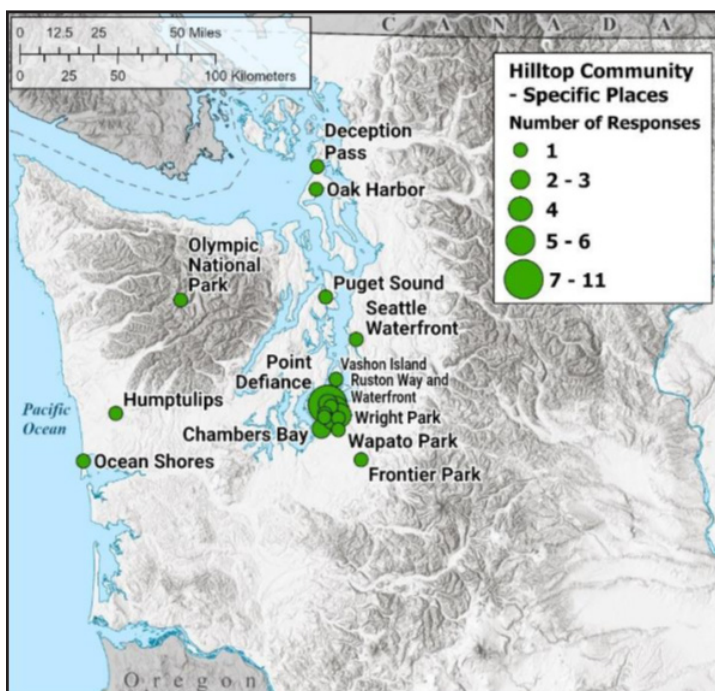


Figure 1. Regional Map of Places that Contribute to Community Members' Wellbeing

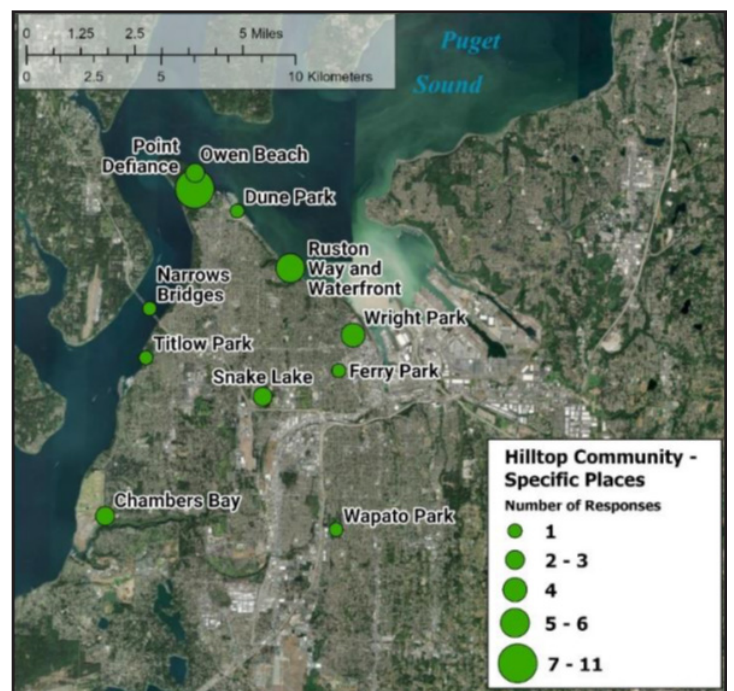


Figure 2. Local Map of Places that Contribute to Community Members' Wellbeing



Figure 3. Workshop Response Example (“What is wellbeing?”)

Key project findings include:

- current HWB Vital Signs resonated and were considered relevant among Hilltop community participants (except shellfish beds);
- Hilltop community participants identified alternative community dimensions of HWB, including: accessibility, equity, physical health, place and landscape, plants and trees, and safety;
- Hilltop community participants often emphasized environmental justice concerns during the project;
- Hilltop community participants’ HWB survey results largely mirrored the results of other HWB surveys with some notable exceptions, including: lower good governance average responses, lower sound stewardship average responses, and lower life satisfaction;
- Hilltop community participants largely visited and engaged nature at local natural areas in the greater Tacoma area (Figure 1-2);
- CBPR approach was effective at more inclusively engaging Hilltop community members in HWB monitoring and research; and
- environmental justice should be more comprehensively integrated into HWB monitoring and planning in Puget Sound.

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AUTHORS

D.J. Trimbach
B. Nelson
M. Chang

N. Gutierrez
R. Niggemann
G. Gerdes

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