

Skagit Audubon Conservation Notes May 3, 2022

The three items below were on the agenda for the May 3, 2022, Skagit Audubon board meeting.

1. Skagit County's Shoreline Master Program

Skagit Audubon joined other conservation groups (Evergreen Islands, Mt. Baker Chapter of the Sierra Club, Washington Environmental Council, RE Sources, Skagit Land Trust, and Guemes Island Planning Advisory Committee) in sending a detailed letter to Skagit County on the draft Shoreline Master Program (SMP) at the end of March. The letter focused particularly on why effects of climate change such as flooding and sea level rise should be addressed in the SMP and identified specific places where wording should be added or changed to incorporate consideration for these effects of the changing climate.

On April 11th, the county commissioners met with planning staff and the contractor helping with the Shoreline Master Program to discuss the public comments. The transcript of that discussion is at [04112022 BOCC SMP Public Comments Review.pdf \(skagitcounty.net\)](https://www.skagitcounty.net/BOCC/SMP/04112022_BOCC_SMP_Public_Comments_Review.pdf). The contractor, who has worked with many other jurisdictions on their Shoreline Master Programs, in response to Commissioner Wesen, though the dominant attitude seems to favor an approach of cautioning property owners and leaving it to them rather than also looking to county regulations and action to address climate change related problems.

At some point, the county will forward the draft SMP to the Department of Ecology (DOE), which will hold a public hearing and determine the plan's adequacy. Given that state law does not require addressing sea level rise and that the county has been consulting with DOE while developing this draft, it is quite possible the draft SMP will meet state approval as is. The group letter mentioned above did argue that the Shoreline Management Act requires applying the best available science in developing SMPs, and the best available science clearly shows sea level rise and other effects of climate change to be factual.

See the April Conservation Notes for additional background information. Extensive documentation related to developing the draft SMP is on the county's website at [Shoreline Master Program Update \(skagitcounty.net\)](https://www.skagitcounty.net/ShorelineMasterProgramUpdate).

2. Cascade Big Bear Mine

Several years ago Kiewit, a national mining company, proposed a 100-year plan to quarry large stone at a site near Marblemount called the Cascade Big Bear Mine. Concerted opposition from individuals, agencies, tribes, and conservation groups such as Skagit Audubon ended in Kiewit withdrawing its proposal. Skagit Audubon's comments focused on the likely adverse impacts on a variety of avian and other wildlife at the site and nearby, including peregrine falcons nesting on the cliff face of the quarry. A year or two later another large mining company, Martin Marietta, revived the plan in a slightly different form. A local group, the Skagit River Alliance, again rallied the attention of agencies, tribes, and conservation groups concerned about likely adverse effects on wildlife habitat and on human health and safety. The rock to be quarried contains cancer-causing asbestos.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which issues mining permits, eventually made a “Determination of Significance” under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), meaning that the project proponent would be required to complete a full environmental impact statement thoroughly analyzing the potential impacts of the mining project. Early in April, the proponent withdrew their application for a mining permit. As stated in a news release from the Skagit River Alliance:

“After reviewing the permit application materials, updates, and clarifications submitted by the applicant for the Cascade Big Bear mine proposal, DNR conducted an informal consultation process including input from affected tribes and agencies with subject matter expertise, including Northwest Clean Air Agency, Department of Ecology, and Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife. Based upon DNR’s review of the application documents, and with consideration of the input received in DNR’s consultation process, DNR issued an intended SEPA threshold Determination of Significance (DS) because DNR determined that “probable significant adverse environmental impacts” are likely to result from the proposed mining operation. ...

“This Monday, April 4, 2022 the applicant informed DNR of their decision to withdraw their application.)”

The letter from the Northwest Clean Air Agency notably stated, in reference to the type of rock to be quarried:

“Shuksan Greenschist makeup includes approximately 25% actinolite, one of the 6 minerals regulated as asbestos in building materials, and is an amphibole, which is a group of asbestos minerals of highest risk for causing lung cancer and mesothelioma.”

The letter noted the considerable challenges involved in safely quarrying this type of rock.

3. Opposing reconstruction of the upper Stehekin Valley Road in North Cascades National Park

Cascade Pass in North Cascades National Park divides Skagit and Chelan Counties and the watersheds of the Cascade and Stehekin Rivers. Years ago, increasingly frequent and severe storm events destroyed portions of the single track upper Stehekin Valley Road. The few roads in the Stehekin watershed have no connection outside the Stehekin Valley, all access being by foot, horseback, float plane, or passenger ferry. The upper Stehekin Valley Road served solely as motorized access to trailheads along a former mine-to-market road. Fifty feet either side of the center line of the road is Congressionally designated wilderness (part of the Stephen Mather Wilderness). The trailheads are all accessible by trail. In 2006, the National Park Service determined that restoring the damaged road would cause unacceptable environmental damage. In the face of concerted attempts to force the National Park Service to rebuild the road, including changing the Wilderness boundary to accommodate a new route, various organizations, including Skagit Audubon, spoke out in opposition. In 2010 Skagit Audubon brought a proposed resolution before the Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee (WSACC) opposing Stehekin road reconstruction. The resolution was unanimously adopted by all the chapters present at WSACC’s annual meeting.

This issue has been for the most part quiet until now with the recent arrival of a new Superintendent at North Cascades National Park. The Stehekin Valley is in the heart of the wild

North Cascades, designated recovery habitat for the grizzly, known home of wolverines, the restored fisher, and a host of other wildlife. The impact which road construction and use would have, not to mention the very high expense, is not a reasonable trade-off so that a relatively few people can walk fewer miles.

In April, Skagit Audubon joined other conservation groups in signing a group letter to Park Superintendent Don Striker opposing reconstruction of the road. Among the other signers were North Central Washington Audubon, North Cascades Audubon, Washington Wild, the Sierra Club, the National Parks Conservation Association, and more.

Other Issues of Interest to Skagit Audubon

For other issues Skagit Audubon has followed or is currently tracking, see earlier issues of Conservation Notes on the Skagit Audubon website: [Skagit Audubon Society - Home](#) under the Conservation tab at the top of the page.

Issues needing action:

Audubon members can advocate for regional and national protection of birds and other wildlife and their habitat by responding to action alerts from Washington Audubon and National Audubon. Sign up for Audubon Washington's Action Network at [Join Our Action Network | Audubon Washington](#) (replace my name and address with yours). The National Audubon website ([Advocacy & Action | Audubon](#)) has abundant information on Audubon's numerous current conservation campaigns. Sign up there to receive national alerts. Also see the Audubon Washington blog for information about a variety of interesting and important issues: [AuduBlog | Audubon Washington](#).