

Dear Interested Parties,

The Department of Ecology, with support from other state agencies, will formally request today that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency protect Puget Sound by approving a Clean Water Act no-discharge zone for vessel sewage. If approved by EPA, the determination would prohibit commercial and recreational vessels from releasing any type of sewage into Puget Sound.

Puget Sound's shellfish beds, swimming beaches and protected areas are vulnerable to all sources of pollution, including bacteria and viruses in vessel sewage. Washington has made a tremendous investment in the protection and restoration of Puget Sound and the proposed no-discharge zone is an important piece of the strategy. While the EPA has established more than 90 such zones in 26 states, the no-discharge zone would be the first in Washington and the Northwest.

The state's petition follows more than four years of research and discussions with organizations representing vessel owners, business and environmental organizations, and other interests. The state examined how pathogens from vessel sewage can affect Puget Sound's water quality and key resources, such as shellfish harvesting.

Puget Sound is ready with 173 pump-out stations at 102 locations for recreational boaters, plus 15 commercial pump-outs, 21 mobile pump-out boats, and pumper trucks. This far exceeds the number of pump-out facilities required by EPA to request a no-discharge zone. Ecology and its partners are using grant funding to add even more commercial pump-outs. The Washington State Parks Commission provided federal clean vessel act funding to establish most of the state's pump-out facilities.

Owners of some commercial vessels – including tug boats, fishing vessels, and small passenger carriers – face significant costs to replace sanitation treatment devices with holding tanks. Ecology is asking EPA to allow five years for these changeovers to occur. It would be the longest phase-in for these types of commercial vessels ever provided for in a new no-discharge zone.

While the current number and location of pumpouts are sufficient to meet the Clean Water Act criteria to designate all of Puget Sound a no-discharge zone for all vessels, it is recognized that additional pumpout infrastructure would add more utility for tug boats, small commercial passenger vessels and commercial fishing vessels. Therefore, Ecology will collaborate with those sectors to develop, help fund and implement a five-year pumpout infrastructure program that is designed to provide additional pumpout options.

If approved by the EPA, Ecology and other agencies would begin implementing the zone's no-discharge requirement with education and technical assistance. These efforts would be augmented, as needed, by law enforcement in response to violations. The zone of protection would encompass 2,300 square miles and include all marine waters east of New Dungeness on the Strait of Juan de Fuca, plus lakes Washington, Lake Union and the waters that connect them to Puget Sound. As an immediate benefit, the Department of Health has estimated that at least 500 acres of shellfish beds would be upgraded for harvest.

After receiving the final petition, EPA has 90 days to make an initial decision on Washington's petition. A proposal by EPA to approve the petition would begin a 30 day public comment period, followed by a final decision. The final petition and additional information can be found on Ecology's no-discharge zone website.

If you have any questions, or if you do not wish to receive further e-mails regarding the NDZ, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Amy

Amy Jankowiak

Department of Ecology, Northwest Regional Office
Water Quality Program, NDZ Lead