

Marine Spatial Planning

Ocean and coastal environments in Washington are critical to our economy, culture, and quality of life. Yet, there are conflicts among uses of these resources and increasing demands on these resources, including new uses. We want to ensure our oceans and coasts are healthy for future generations to enjoy. We need to better coordinate our approach to managing these resources – marine spatial planning is a process that does that.

Q: What is Marine Spatial Planning?

A: Marine spatial planning is a process for coordinating decisions for coastal and ocean activities and environments in a comprehensive plan.

Marine spatial planning uses data on the location of important marine resources, human activities, and other key components to determine the most appropriate locations for particular uses. The planning process often displays and analyzes this information using maps and other tools to inform the development of the plan.

For more information on marine spatial planning contact the Department of Ecology at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/msp/index.html>

Q: How can Marine Spatial Planning improve management of Marine Resources?

A: Marine Spatial Planning can improve management of marine resources in several ways. Often, it is used to:

- Reduce conflicts among uses and promote compatible uses.
- Reduce environmental impacts.
- Align management decisions across many government entities.
- Address emerging issues and new uses of marine resources like renewable energy.

WHY IT MATTERS

In Washington's 15 coastal counties, there are about 2,000 square miles of marine waters and over 2,300 linear miles of marine shoreline. As a result, our state is particularly reliant on healthy marine waters and resources. A wide range of marine uses drive the state's economy such as maritime, shipping, and fishing and shellfish industries; boating and other recreational opportunities; and tourism. However, these uses sometimes conflict with each other and new uses like renewable energy are on the horizon.

Protecting and sustaining our marine resources for the future, while allowing appropriate uses in the right locations is critical. Marine spatial planning is a process that can help us achieve this balance in a comprehensive way.

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Special accommodations

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Persons with hearing loss, call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability, call 877-833-6341.

Q: What is the state doing related to Marine Spatial Planning?

A: In March 2010, the state legislature enacted a law on marine spatial planning (Substitute Senate Bill 6350). The first task in this new law is for an interagency team to provide recommendations to the legislature about how to effectively use marine spatial planning in Washington. A key element of this is figuring out how to integrate marine spatial planning into existing state management plans and authorities. We must identify major needs, including gaps in management and data. These gaps are important to understand what the state needs and how to do marine spatial planning in Washington, such as the scope, cost, and process.

Washington will use an existing interagency team, the State Ocean Caucus to conduct this assessment and submit the report due to the legislature by December 15, 2010. The team is chaired by the Governor's office and coordinated by Ecology.

The legislature did not provide money necessary for the state to develop a marine spatial plan. Once federal and other non-state funds become available then the state will conduct planning. At that time, with funds to do planning, the state will further scope out and refine the actual planning process.

Q: How can I participate in the process?

A: There will be opportunity for the public to weigh in throughout the state's effort to assess marine spatial planning. During summer and fall 2010, these opportunities include providing input via a survey and a public comment period on the draft report to the legislature. The state will also conduct focused outreach to key stakeholders using a variety of existing forums.

Q: What does a Marine Spatial Plan "look" like? What will a plan look like in Washington State?

A: A final plan depends on the management needs, goals and objectives set for the planning process. Marine spatial plans in many other states have focused on appropriate locations for renewable energy developments. Some of these plans also seek to protect traditional uses and sensitive environments.

The new marine spatial planning law sets out some general principles, guidelines and key elements for doing a plan in Washington. However, the law provides flexibility and adaptability in how to do the planning. The law specifically requires the state to establish a framework for renewable energy as part of the plan.

Q: How does this relate to work by the federal government?

A: Federal agencies, at the request of the President, are developing a federal approach to marine spatial planning. We expect the final framework to be released sometime during spring or summer 2010. Given the federal government's interest in this topic, the state law sends an important signal to the federal government about Washington's increased commitment to the health of our marine waters, working in coordination with federal, state and tribal governments, coastal communities and stakeholders. It also helps the state identify and shape the use of marine spatial planning in a way that best works for Washington.

Q: How does marine spatial planning differ from work by various agencies?

A: Washington state agencies already do a lot to manage different aspects of marine uses and resources. However, this approach to management has often failed to comprehensively address overall health of our resources and uses in a coordinated manner. Marine spatial planning is a process to improve and align decisions for marine waters in a comprehensive plan with common goals and shared outcomes. Marine spatial planning has a unique focus on a wide range of mapped information to guide decisions. As a result, this planning can integrate into and complement existing management and improve data used for decisions.

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