

# Meeting Attendee Survey Summary: Western Washington Shoreline Planners Quarterly Meetings

The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) has hosted quarterly meetings since 2008 for Western Washington local governments updating their Shoreline Master Programs. Ecology conducted a short, online survey of past and present meeting attendees in February 2012 to assess how to make the meetings more meaningful and useful to attendees. This document briefly summarizes the results of that survey.

## Background

Approximately 260 cities and counties must update their Shoreline Master Programs by December 2014 in compliance with the Shoreline Management Act (Ch. 90.58 RCW) and related rules. Ecology provides grant funding to local governments for the updates and hosts quarterly meetings as one way to provide technical assistance and support; share information about requirements, recent case law, and legislative actions; and encourage networking among local government staff.

Ecology holds separate meetings on the west side of the state and the east side of the state. Ecology only included west side meeting attendees in the pool of possible respondents but may replicate this survey with east side meeting attendees in the near future.

Ecology held the first west side meeting in April 2006 in Seattle. In July 2008 the meetings were moved to Tukwila, and in January 2012 the meetings were moved to Tumwater to be closer to new grantees. Ecology generally holds the meetings 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. the fourth Thursday of January, April, July, and October.

West side meeting attendance has ranged from approximately 50 to 100. Attendees are primarily local government staff, their consultants, and state agency staff who work closely with the local governments. Cities and counties who receive state grants to update their programs are not required to send staff to the meetings; however, meeting attendance is encouraged and a grant-eligible expense.

The update process takes 2-3 years or longer. As of today, 47 cities and counties have completed the process. Local governments start their update at various times depending on criteria set by the legislature – not specific geographic location. This means that west side local governments are at various stages in the update process, and it's a challenge for Ecology to provide germane meeting content and a location convenient to all local governments currently working on their update.

Ecology conducted the simple online survey to assess how to make the meetings more meaningful and worthwhile for the hundreds of local governments who still need to complete

their updates – especially those just getting under way. Ecology also conducted the survey to get input on topics of interest to local governments and garner ideas on how to increase interaction and networking among attendees.

## **Survey Design**

Respondents were given two weeks (February 1-15, 2012) to complete the simple, online survey provided through Survey Monkey. The survey included 15 questions of which 13 were multiple-choice and two were open-ended.

In order to solicit as much input as possible, Ecology offered “Other” as an option with five of the questions, and respondents were asked to provide more detail when they chose answers that were in the negative. For example, with Question 4, if a respondent indicated that the meeting time was “Not convenient,” they were prompted to provide input on how to make the meetings more convenient.

Ecology announced the survey at the January 28 meeting and distributed it on February 1 via email to an existing listserv of 295 past and present meeting attendees. Ecology sent a reminder on February 14 which was very effective at increasing the response rate.

Since Ecology staff is on the listserv and some Ecology staff opted to take the survey, the results summarized below are based on the 71 non-Ecology staff responses only.

## **Results**

### Key Findings

Ecology should continue to hold quarterly meetings at the current time with an effort to end the meeting early when possible. The current method of sending invitations and agendas is working for the large majority of attendees and should be continued.

The Roundtable portion of the meeting is beneficial to attendees, but needs to be more succinct and everyone needs to stand up and speak louder, or there needs to be a microphone available to ensure everyone can be heard.

Presentations should be directly relevant to the update requirements and provide a way for peer-to-peer learning among local governments. Panels and topical presentations are the most valued by attendees, as is the legislative update and networking during breaks and lunch. The meetings should also provide more opportunity for small group discussions among local governments – either by topic, geographic locale, or phase of the update process. Separate meetings or breakout sessions organized around each phase of the update process was especially noted by respondents in the open-ended responses.

To encourage more interaction, the meeting facilitator should call on non-Ecology staff first, and Ecology should integrate small group discussions into the meeting format. Ecology should also find a way to facilitate sharing of documents, graphics, photos and other printed information among local governments outside of the meetings.

The top three topics that should be on the agenda in 2012 are no net loss, shoreline buffers, and lessons learned from adopted shoreline master programs.

### Respondent characterization (Questions 1 and 3)

Seventy-one past and current meeting attendees responded to the survey (24% response rate). Of these, 75% were local government staff, 13% were state agency staff, 10% were private consultants, and one was from academia.

Almost half (45%) of the respondents have attended 2-5 meetings, a quarter (23%) have attended 6-9 meetings, 18% have attended only one meeting, and 14% have attended 10 or more meetings. The high number of attendees with only one meeting is most likely a reflection of the recent round of new grantees just starting their update process.

### Meeting frequency, time, and notification (Questions 2, 4 and 10)

The frequency of the quarterly meetings work well for 76% of the respondents, and the 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. timeslot is “very” or “moderately” convenient for 88% of the respondents. Zero respondents would prefer monthly or annual meetings. Most comments were about the 4:00 ending time – which makes the commute north to the urban Puget Sound core difficult for some attendees. There were several suggestions on how to resolve this, including holding alternate sub-regional meetings every other month. Ecology’s emailed meeting announcements provide adequate notice and information for 97% of the respondents.

### How to make the meetings more comfortable (Question 5)

When asked if Ecology could do anything to make the meetings more comfortable (e.g. room temperature, chairs, coat rack, lighting, sound system, accessibility), most respondents (66%) answered “No.” Of the 34% that responded “Yes,” suggestions for improvements ranged widely from “Recliners?” to providing food again to adjusting the room setup.

### Reasons for attending the meetings (Question 6)

The leading reason (41%) why respondents attend the meetings is “Staying current on guidance and technical assistance available.” The second leading reason (21%) is “Staying current on regulations and policies.” Networking with local government staff is another reason for meeting attendance (13%).



### Ranking of agenda elements for their value (Question 7)

Sixty-eight respondents rated previously and currently used agenda elements according to “how valuable you’ve found these elements.” The agenda elements that received the highest rankings when combining the “very valuable” and “valuable” scores are:

1. Topical presentations from local governments (87%)
2. Topical presentations from state agencies and panels (83-84%)
3. Legislative update from Ecology (81%)
4. Roundtable (62%)
5. Informal networking during breaks and lunch (59%)

Of the 68 respondents who answered this question, only a few (4 or less) indicated that Ecology should not use the Roundtable, the Legislative update, or Informal networking during breaks and lunch.

### Topics for 2012 (Question 9)

Ecology used the survey to solicit feedback on topics for meetings in 2012. Respondents were presented a list of all 43 previous topics, plus an “Other” option to suggest new topics.

Over half the respondents want No Net Loss (57%) and Shoreline Buffers (51%) on the meeting agenda in 2012. Agenda topics selected by 30-50% of the respondents included:

- Lessons learned from adopted SMPs
- Nonconforming uses
- Cumulative impacts analysis
- Armoring
- Flood/FEMA
- Restoration Plan
- GMA/CAO
- Managing existing development

The least desirable topics for 2012 (selected by less than 10% of respondents) are those more peripheral to planning tasks local governments must complete (see Ecology's [Shoreline Planners Toolbox](#) for details). They include: Coastal atlas, state-owned aquatic lands, marine spatial planning, Puget Sound habitat/nearshore studies, lakes, parks/open space, DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan, legislation, and shoreline jurisdiction.

Grants also received a fairly low level of interest (13%) among respondents, but grant information is very important. A separate workshop or lunchtime meeting may be the best way for Ecology to distribute grant information.

Twenty-four percent of respondents gave an "Other" response to Question 9. Suggested topics included view protection, monitoring, vegetation conservation, water law, shorelines of statewide significance, implementation, private property rights, dealing with opposition groups, reach vs. basin vs. jurisdictional lines, and results of the recent EPA forums.

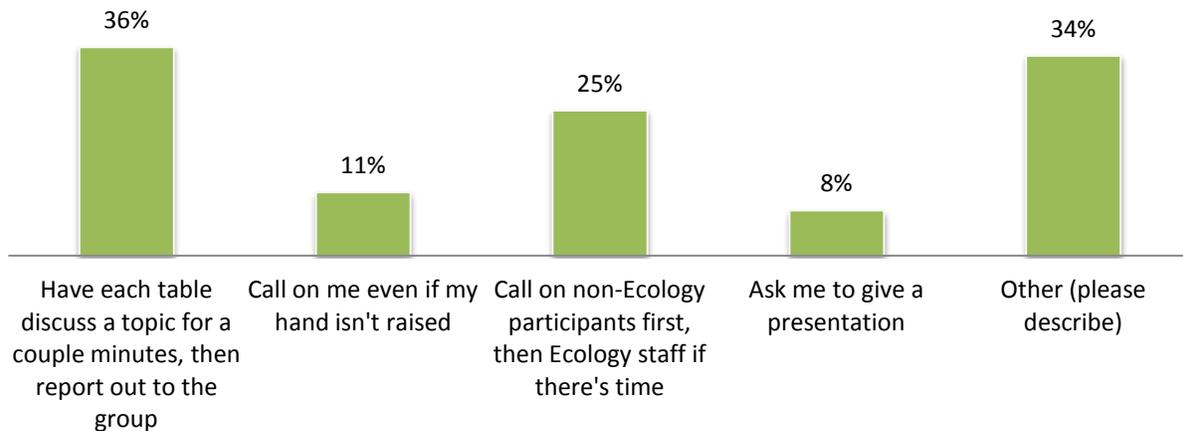
#### Enough networking time (Question 11)

Eighty-one percent of respondents felt there is enough networking time provided at the meetings. Among the 19% that feel there should be more, there was general agreement that smaller group discussions organized around topic, region, watershed, County or phase of the update process would be helpful.

#### Encourage participation by attendees (Question 12)

When asked how Ecology could encourage more participation by meeting attendees, over a third (36%) of the respondents indicated that table or other small group discussions would be helpful. A quarter (25%) of respondents indicated that calling on non-Ecology staff first would encourage their participation. Nineteen percent of respondents indicated that the facilitator should "call on me even if my hand isn't raised" or "ask me to give a presentation."

**Sometimes only a few people join in the discussions.  
We'd like more people to contribute their experiences and ideas.  
How can we encourage you to share more?**



Additional resources (Questions 13 and 14)

Ecology uses the Shoreline Planners Toolbox web page to provide access to meeting materials. When asked if attendees had accessed the materials, almost one-third marked that they found them “easy to find”. Almost half (47%) marked that they have never tried to locate the presentation materials. Over 17% had some difficulty finding the materials, but eventually did.

Ecology has recently moved the location of the materials to make them easier to find. Since some respondents may not have looked for the presentation materials since the location change, responses to Question 13 are not necessarily a reflection of current accessibility.

When asked if meeting attendees would use a SharePoint site for sharing their Shoreline Master Program documents, photos, graphics and other relevant materials – 77% said “yes”, 6% said “no”, and 17% said “maybe” – depending on the ease of use and practical application to their update process. Maintaining such a site is staff intensive so Ecology does not plan to pursue a SharePoint site at this time because of the current state budget crisis; however, it is helpful to know that many of the meeting attendees would like to see more sharing of materials. Ecology plans to explore other, less staff intensive options.

If you were in charge of organizing the meetings (Question 15)

Question 15 invited respondents to think out of the box and provide creative direction on how to improve the meetings. Almost half (33) of the total survey respondents answered this open-ended question. Responses included several compliments to Ecology such as “meetings work very well”, “nice work”, “doing good....keep it up”. Two key suggestions are regional and topical breakouts into small groups, and more discussion by planning phase. Another key suggestion is to improve the Roundtable by ensuring everyone can be heard.