

Shoreline Master Programs: commercial salmon net pens

Aquaculture is an historic, water-dependent use of Washington's shorelines. Commercial salmon net pens have operated in state waters for almost 40 years. There are currently eight commercial net pens in our state; they encompass a total of 21 surface acres and raise Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*).

These net pens are located near:

- Port Angeles in Clallam County (1 site)
- Bainbridge Island in Kitsap County (3 sites)
- Cypress and Hope islands in Skagit County (4 sites)



Commercial net pen near Fort Ward, Bainbridge Island.

Concerns about net pens

Some local governments and their residents have raised concerns about commercial net pens, including potential impacts related to water and sediment quality, Atlantic salmon, disease, sea lice, and shoreline views – and they want to prohibit or strongly limit future net pens through local Shoreline Master Programs.¹

This is an important issue because coastal cities and counties are currently updating their shoreline programs. These locally tailored programs are the cornerstone of the Shoreline Management Act² and are one of many regulatory tools for siting and permitting commercial net pens.

¹ See <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/shorelines/smp/index.html>.

² RCW 90.58

WHY IT MATTERS

Many coastal cities and counties are updating their shoreline master programs that regulate commercial salmon net pens.

Local shoreline programs will strongly influence the future of commercial net pens in Washington.

Ecology and local governments are working together to address concerns about potential use conflicts and impacts to the environment.

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Requirements outlined in state law

The Shoreline Management Act and its implementing regulations³ identify water dependent uses – such as aquaculture – as a preferred use for state shorelines and waters. For shorelines of statewide significance, including all of marine waters below the line of extreme low tide, the act also declares that statewide interests take precedence over local interests.⁴ Aquaculture, which includes net pens, is specifically identified as an “activity of statewide interest”⁵ in the shoreline regulations and other policies.⁶

Therefore, jurisdiction-wide prohibitions of new pens may be in conflict with state law. However, state law does not require net pens be allowed everywhere and net pens may not be appropriate in some waters, depending on site specific conditions and applicable scientific information.⁷

Current practices and permitting

There is a legacy of concerns stemming from historic problems with Puget Sound net pens. Past large escapement events and certain practices were rightfully concerning. Net pen operations have greatly improved in the last 20 years and have become increasingly regulated. Commercial net pens are currently subject to state permits which require mitigation of environmental impacts and ongoing monitoring. Local governments also may use their permitting authority to evaluate proposals and require mitigation and monitoring.

Our commitment

Ecology is committed to ensuring that commercial salmon net pens do not put Pacific salmon recovery at risk. Based on the current regulatory and permitting structure and our review of the science, Ecology has found that when commercial net pens are properly sited, operated and monitored to include all necessary safeguards, they are compatible with objectives of the state Shoreline Management Act.

Ecology will continue to review information and work closely with local governments, citizens, and scientific experts to respond to concerns about this historic, water-dependent use.

For more information

- Net pen aquaculture: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/aquaculture/netpen.html>
- Shoreline Master Programs: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/shorelines/smp/index.html>
- SMP Handbook, Aquaculture Guidance:
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/shorelines/smp/handbook/aquaculture_guidance.pdf
- Shoreline Management Act: http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/sma/st_guide/intro.html

³ Chapter 173-26 Part III WAC

⁴ RCW 90.58.020

⁵ WAC 173-76-241(3)(b)(i)(A)

⁶ For example, WA Department of Agriculture: RCW 15.85.010

⁷ For example, a prohibition has been allowed in Kitsap County south of Hazel Point (lower Hood Canal)