

King County Shoreline Master Program Update

Peer Review Comments on Draft King County Shorelines Technical Appendix (September 2006)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Peer Review Process

In 2006, King County invited technical experts to act as peer reviewers of the Draft King County Shorelines Technical Appendix. Qualified scientific professionals were selected on the basis of their expertise on shoreline technical issues, determined by:

- professional credentials and/or certification;
- degrees earned in the pertinent scientific discipline from a recognized university;
- significant experience in the pertinent scientific discipline;
- recognized leadership in the discipline of interest, formal training in the specific area of expertise; and
- field and/or laboratory experience with evidence of the ability to produce peer-reviewed publications or other professional literature.

No one factor above was determinative in deciding whether a person was considered as a qualified scientific expert. These criteria are based on WAC 365-195-905(4).

Of the 15 experts invited to participate in the peer review, 12 responded with substantial comments during the first official comment period in September 2006. These comments were considered by King County shorelines technical staff in preparing the December 2006 draft of the Technical Appendix.

Over 150 comments were made on all sections of the Technical Appendix. Most of these comments concerned Section 2, which detailed the work carried out by the County to describe and characterize the current ecological conditions of shorelines throughout the unincorporated area. Reviewer comments concentrated on their areas of expertise, with comments ranging from very broad evaluations of the purpose and scope to specific suggestions for wording changes.

Summary of Major Comments

- Comment: King County asked peer reviewers to evaluate the analysis of ecological conditions as a rating of current functions along the shorelines, however the analysis focused on an evaluation of ecological processes.
Response: King County shorelines technical staff concluded that ecological functionality was a broad concept that could not be evaluated for the shorelines using available data, particularly available biological information. Data on alterations to processes were more accessible, reliable, up-to-date, and complete. An assessment of ecological process alteration was determined to be more reliable than an assessment of function. The assessment of processes would also be more likely to be useful over time and for evaluating

a variety of questions. The relationships between process, structure, and function could also be invoked to infer the potential for alteration of a particular function along any shoreline. The introduction to Section 2 was revised to clarify this approach and rationale.

- Comment: Though the ecological analysis was referred to as a “model,” it did not contain the classic model elements of mathematical simulation of process, prediction of results, and verification.
Response: While the geographic information system (GIS) software used to do the assessment is called “Model Builder,” the process constructed by the technical staff is not a model in that classic sense, but rather a decision-making tool built to combine geographical information from many sources into a single rating that characterizes shorelines. The analysis is now referred to as an assessment/analysis tool throughout the Technical Appendix to make the distinction clear.
- Comment: Several reviewers wondered why biological data was not included in the ecological assessment tool, when some biological data is available for areas of the county.
Response: King County technical staff determined that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to use the available biological data for this analysis because most data sets are not comprehensive across the entire county; data sets are not current or kept up to date, nor re-evaluated over time; the nature of the data collected does not lend itself to habitat evaluation (e.g., presence/absence based on one-time observations); there is a lack of a reported methodology for data collection and evaluation; and in many cases there is a lack of precision or replicability. The available biological data was determined to be useful in informing management and restoration planning, rather than as an integral element for assessing processes along all shorelines. The biological data is considered in summarizing the overall basin conditions (for those basins associated with shorelines of the State).
- Comment: Assumptions behind the work needed to be more prominently identified and clearly discussed.
Response: Many of the assumptions were compiled into one section and limitations of the analysis were defined more specifically.
- Comment: Many suggestions were made as to which ecological parameters should be considered in rating shoreline conditions and how the parameters should be taken into account when scoring shorelines for various processes.
Response: These suggestions were all evaluated by King County technical staff and changes were made to the assessment tool.

Several reviewers provided comments after the peer review comment deadline; these comments were accepted and considered, but are not included in the official response to peer reviewers.

Further Information

Specific peer review comments and County responses are compiled and can be made available to interested parties on request. Please contact Jill Moe, King County Shoreline Master Program Update Manager, at jill.moe@metrokc.gov or by phone at 206-263-6057 for further information.