

[The following testimony is a transcription of oral testimony recorded on November 13, 2017, at the webinar hearing for proposed Chapter 173-228 WAC – Vessel Sewage No Discharge Zone. The testimony was transcribed by Dept. of Ecology staff. The original audio file of this testimony is part of the rule file (Administrative Order #17-02).]

Skagit Audubon Society:

My name is Tim Mann. I live in Mount Vernon, Washington. I'm representing the Skagit Audubon Society, and more than 500 families in Skagit County who are Audubon members.

Three years ago, we joined other Audubon chapters and conservation groups signing a letter in support of designating a No Discharge Zone in Puget Sound. I'm repeating that support today.

The mission of Audubon, of National Audubon, is to further the preservation and restoration of wildlife habitat with a special, but not a sole, emphasis on birds. Our members also enjoy the simple joy of learning about and observing birds.

The marine waters of Skagit County are a particular haven for birds in winter when many species of waterfowl, sea birds, and raptors gather here. These birds depend on the fish, invertebrates, and plants in Puget Sound which, in turn, need clean water in order to thrive.

To give one example specific to Skagit County, virtually all the Grey-bellied race, pardon me, virtually all the Grey-bellied race of Brant, a small goose nesting in the Canadian arctic, winter off Skagit County, particularly on Padilla and Samish Bays. Brants feed directly on eelgrass, and Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve protects 8,000 acres of that plant. This is the largest eelgrass meadow in the U.S. Pacific Coast, and it's highly important for a variety of marine creatures, from Dungeness crab to Chinook salmon to Grey-bellied Brant.

Nutrient loading from sewage discharge acts as a stressor for species such as eelgrass, on which so many creatures depend. I would also mention the federally and State listed Marbled Murrelet, which is in rapid decline around Puget Sound. While the loss of nesting habitat for this bird is likely the single greatest cause of its decline, the Murrelet is also stressed by decline in forage fish populations, which provide its principle food. Forage fish depend on both the presence of their necessary spawning habitat, and also on clean water with abundant plankton, on which they feed. Sewage discharges are detrimental to water quality and threaten stability of the food web on which the Marbled Murrelet, forage fish, and many other species depend.

Establishing a No Discharge Zone in Puget Sound is an obvious and necessary step towards protecting and restoring the Sound and its diverse wildlife.

Thank you, very much, for the opportunity to comment.