Cynthia Jones

The draft Shoreline Management rules are a significant step forward but environmental protection must be stronger. As much as 80% of estuary habitat in Washington State has been lost and much of what remains is threatened by rising ocean levels. We must allow shorelines and estuaries to naturally migrate inland as sea levels rise. The Shoreline Management Plan should include climate change in critical area standards and account for sea level rise and changing hydrology, including the landward migration of wetlands and critical saltwater habitats. New bulding should not be allowed in areas vulnerable to sea level rise. Hard shoreline stabilization does not solve the problem of encroaching sea level and should only be allowed above the future high water level mark.

No net loss has been a fundamental principle in shoreline management since 2003 but is not working. Significant shoreline environmental function has been lost since then and losses continue today. Enforcement needs to be strengthened. For example, 85% of new shoreline armoring installed in Island County between 2016 and 2023 was unpermitted. The Shoreline Management Plan should require the removal of any hard shoreline stabilization or structures built without approval. The Shoreline Management Plan should also require performance and maintenance bonds for all environmental mitigation projects to ensure long-term accountability.

We can do better for our shorelines, to ensure environmental functionality and beauty and to help mitigate against the impacts of rising sea levels.