Zia Gipson

I'm Zia Gipson. I have lived in unincorporated Island County in the Maxwelton watershed for more than 29 years. I am writing to urge you to strengthen the Shoreline Management Act specifically the permitting process including monitoring, inspections, and corrective action when violations or unmet mitigation requirements occur.

For much of the time I have lived on Whidbey I have belonged to a 15 person strong walking group . Six days a week ,year-in, year-out we amble along Sunlight Beach Road, across the east dike until we reach Soundview Drive and Useless Bay community. There we resume our walk in reverse until we reach Sunlight Beach and walk up the hill to the intersection with Bayview Road. Various ones of us have made this walk thousands of times!

To us, this land on the edge of Deer Lake Lagoon where water meets a vast sky and estuary, is precious territory. Our local beach is home to osprey, eagles, great blue herons, pelicans, otters, fish, kingfishers, and many other species.

But the path we walk is paved with irony! The beach side homes we walk past have built and continue to rebuild coastal armoring to protect their investments. This of course, only makes erosion and storm damage worse for others. Here, as well as in other waterfront communities we are seeing a kind of "beach money race" to see who can armor faster, and bigger and still get away with it. Another irony, as the houses get bigger and bigger and bigger, the beach gets smaller and smaller.

Based on recent survey data (Island County Shoreline Armor Survey) 85% of armored structures were found to have been made without permits! On Sunlight Beach that may well amount to some 40 houses that have/are in violation!

I have lived looking at the water since 1984, first in Tacoma, later in Seattle and finally on Whidbey Island. I came to WA originally because, having grown up in TX and the midwest I was called to water for its beauty and natural blessings. Now I am pained to see the state and Island County doing very little to stop the obvious damage coastal armoring is doing to our fragile ecosystems. We need more monitoring, inspections and significant fines! (I should add that many of these beach houses have values in excess of $1.5 million so the penalties had better be painful and large enough to pay for armoring removal and the legal fees enforcement might entail.)

I would like to add septic systems to my concerns. Tiny Quade Creek, at the bottom of my 4.9 acre property,has been found to have some on the most polluted water in Island County. E-coli is the culprit. In a recent letter to area residents the Health Dept. detailed a number of possible sources. I suspect the big offender is corrupted septic systems along this creek which have long gone uninspected/unpermitted. After a big rain check out the smell along Sunlight Beach. Corrupt septics!

Let's use the force of the Shoreline Management Act to require counties to better monitor and report septic systems. Island County and other jurisdictions need leadership and funding from the state to tackle septic leachate!

(To start why not use AI to gather the data to discover which homeowners have not kept up with the inspections).

Sincerely and with gratitude for your service to this state we all love.