



City of Bothell™

March 15, 2021

Eleanor Ott, P.E.
Washington State Department of Ecology
PO Box 47696
Olympia, WA 98504-7696
<http://wq.ecology.commentinput.com/?id=aiK7u>

RE: Department of Ecology's Puget Sound Nutrient General Permit

Dear Ms. Ott:

I am writing to share the City of Bothell's concerns about the Washington State Department of Ecology's (Ecology) proposed draft Puget Sound Nutrient General Permit for municipal wastewater treatment facilities that discharge into Puget Sound. Ecology's proposed general permit will require significant investments with no assurances these investments will help achieve the region's goal of Puget Sound restoration. We owe it to the region's residents and Puget Sound to find the most cost-effective actions that will provide the greatest water quality benefits. The draft permit includes potential requirements and restrictions that would result in significant wastewater treatment cost increases that will directly impact ratepayers without demonstrative improvements to the health of Puget Sound.

The City of Bothell sewer utility strives to provide safe, affordable, and equitable wastewater collection and conveyance prior to wholesale treatment by the King County Wastewater Treatment Division and discharge to Puget Sound. The City's sewer systems is relatively new, with the majority installed or upgraded within the last few decades, and does not incorporate stormwater discharge that can lead to Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) events and associated release of nutrient rich effluent into Puget Sound. Bothell maintains a rigorous sewer system maintenance and improvement program to reduce Infiltration and Inflow, along with water conservation measures and stringent construction inspection that directly reduce wastewater discharge flow rates. In addition, the City has invested significantly in Capital Projects to further improve the sewer system including installation of 0.8 miles of Cure In Place Pipe (CIPP) sewer main rehabilitation in 2019 and reconstruction of all of City's sewer lift in the last 10 years with updated pumps, back-up generators, and redundant systems to ensure zero overflows into the natural ecosystem.

The City recognizes Ecology's responsibility to maintain compliance with water quality standards and to address dissolved oxygen (DO) impairment in sensitive areas of the Sound. However, Bothell is very concerned though about the impacts of implementing new regulatory

requirements in advance of verifying modeling results with sampling and data analysis, or fully exploring removal technologies' effectiveness and costs.

We appreciate Ecology's efforts to examine how nutrients contribute to DO reductions, and specifically anthropogenic sources of nutrient loading. There are, however, significant uncertainties and gaps in scientific information and disputed science regarding the relative impact of anthropogenic sources on DO levels. The proposed permit requirements do not provide a significant reduction in nitrogen loading, are not the most cost-effective solution, and are not likely to achieve our shared goal of making significant strides in improving Puget Sound water quality. Additionally, Ecology has not fully considered the economic impacts and environmental trade-offs such as the increase in greenhouse gas emissions that occurs with increased nitrogen removal and broad societal impacts on affordability, equity, and energy use.

Given the significance of imposing additional regulatory requirements, our region must be assured that these investments will result in significant water quality improvements. We understand that early modeling shows it will take a combination of non-point and point source to achieve meaningful reductions in nutrients. The region's wastewater utilities are committed to working with Ecology on watershed modeling and refinement of non-point source contribution of nutrients in Puget Sound. This technical information is necessary to build regional understanding and identify potential management actions related to non-point nutrient sources. There may be other, more cost-effective solutions to meet the low dissolved oxygen levels and we deserve to know what the best solutions are to restore Puget Sound.

Our residents are living in an economy already experiencing severe impacts from COVID-19 and we recommend against adding additional cost burdens without fully exploring the most cost-effective solutions. The large economic impact with respect to the relatively small nutrient decrease should be further evaluated with respect to near- and long-term affordability challenges for residents in the Puget Sound region. If Ecology proceeds with setting new standards it should include other potential holistic compliance options such as regional permits or regional water quality trading programs, along with new governance structures to implement such approaches, which could prove to be less costly and more effective for improving water quality.

Finally, Bothell recommends that Ecology extend its nutrients general permit schedule to allow sufficient time to implement the following approach for improving water quality in the Sound:

- Establish an independent panel of scientists and engineers to make recommendations on the effectiveness of alternatives and identifying solutions that would achieve the greatest water quality benefit for the investment,
- Extend the nutrients general permit schedule to enable other alternatives (e.g., water quality trading and regional permits), and
- Collaborate with interested parties to better understand economic implication and develop a regional plan that includes feasibility and affordability.

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Thank you in advance for your consideration of our comments. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me anytime at 425-806-6810 or erin.leonhart@bothellwa.gov.

Best Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'EL', is positioned to the left of the typed name.

Erin Leonhart
Interim City Manager
City of Bothell