



Town of Coupeville

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August 17, 2021

Eleanor Ott, P.E.
Washington State Department of Ecology
PO Box 47696
Olympia, WA 98504-7696

RE: Puget Sound Nutrient General Permit

Dear Ms. Ott,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Washington State Department of Ecology's draft Puget Sound Nutrient General Permit for municipal wastewater treatment facilities that discharge into Puget Sound. The Town of Coupeville is considered a 'small' facility in your draft proposal. The Town has a population of around 1,900 residents. We serve 900 wastewater customers. Our Utility Superintendent, Joe Grogan, has been a very active participant on the Permit Advisory Committee, representing small plants discharging into the Salish Sea. We are very concerned with the timeline for the implementation of this new General Permit, the anticipated cost to our residents and businesses, and the lack of science and reasonableness of the proposed regulations. Following are some of our concerns:

- Ecology is not taking any responsibility to participate in the extensive studies that are required under the proposed permit. Rather than have every municipality conduct their own studies, it would seem to make more sense for Ecology to do regional studies on the economic impact, environmental justice impact, and possible solutions for multi-family and commercial buildings to reduce their Total Inorganic Nitrogen (TIN) before implementing new permit requirements. Not only would regional studies be more cost effective they would result in more useful information.
- It is not reasonable to treat all utilities the same, no matter their size. The nutrient loading of small wastewater treatment facility is a minor issue compared to the natural sources of nutrient inflow into the Puget Sound. Addressing large treatment plants and natural sources of nitrogen in surface water runoff would be a more cost efficient and effective solution to reduce nutrient discharge. Your own fact sheet states that the 30 'small' facilities collectively contribute less than 1% of the cumulative domestic point source TIN load into Puget Sound. This is a minuscule amount in the overall picture.
- Because Ecology has not yet set the "final numeric effluent limits" for the new general permit it is frustrating to be required to double our planning efforts to meet two wildly different scenarios. As has been pointed out several times, by all municipalities, going through planning exercises with a goal of 3 mg/L (for instance) requires very different technology and site redevelopment than a target of 8 mg/L. This is another burden for small utilities and seems premature until Ecology has set effluent limits.

- The draft proposal requires 'small' facilities to develop AKART studies by 2025. Given our small size and limited nutrient discharge this would be a considerable expense and staff effort for little positive effect.
- The draft proposal requires all utilities to "document all adaptive management following initial implementation..." As the Utilities Caucus has repeatedly pointed out, most if not all plants already do 'adaptive management.' We implement a process, monitor the results, and change the process as needed. Documenting "all" would be a significant administrative burden and would open agencies to lawsuits because they may not have documented some action.
- The proposal states "Ecology intends for the implemented optimization strategies to help each Permittee stay below their facility specific action level. This prevents additional nitrogen loading into Puget Sound during the period while Ecology completes modeling necessary to determine numeric WQBELs." As utilities must plan for growth and changing circumstances to keep below their action levels, a building moratorium may be necessary during this time. It seems Ecology should complete their modeling before the general permit requirements are determined and put into action.
- The December 2022 deadline to assess, model, evaluate, identify, select and implement nutrient reduction processes is unreasonable and unrealistic for small plants. Again, Ecology should conduct regional assessments, by experts, before the general permit requirements are established and put into effect. Ecology should explore all alternatives that could lead to greater water quality improvements in the Puget Sound. Nutrient reduction may not be the best way for small plants to contribute to the health of the Salish Sea.

Clean and healthy water in the Puget Sound as well as in our own Penn Cove is important to the Town of Coupeville. We want to do our part to improve the quality of our wastewater and stormwater discharge. However, we feel the 'one-size-fits-all' strategy of the new general permit proposal is unreasonable and unrealistic for small municipal utilities. Both the economic impact on our ratepayers and the capacity burdens on our staff would be staggering. We hope you will reconsider the timing of this new permit until the science allows Ecology to provide better information and guidance to all utilities, large and small. Ecology has a responsibility to prove this is the most cost effective and appropriate way to positively impact our Puget Sound waters. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Molly Hughes
Mayor

CC: Coupeville Town Council
Senator Ron Muzzall
Representative Dave Paul
Representative Greg Gilday