

2019 ISSUE PAPER: SHORELINES, WETLANDS, AND LAND USE

Position statement

The League of Women Voters of the United States supports “identification and regulation of areas of critical concern...such as shorelands of rivers, lakes and streams, estuaries and bays;” and “review of environmental, social and economic impacts of major public and private development.”

The LWVWA has consistently supported protections to the state’s natural resources, including shorelines, wetlands, critical areas and natural resource lands. League has worked to protect the following fundamental legislative acts from threats or efforts to weaken them.

Fundamental Legislative Protections

- **State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)** was passed by the Legislature in 1971 and adopted by voters in 1972. SEPA ensures that environmental values will be considered along with economic considerations when legislators make decisions. SEPA requires a broad process of public comment on proposals impacting water, air, land and transportation systems. In 2018, LWVWA supported the successful bill to prevent new, renewing, or extending leases on net pens for nonnative finfish in marine aquaculture.
- **Shoreline Management Act (SMA)** was adopted by voters in 1972 “to prevent the inherent harm in an uncoordinated and piecemeal development of the state’s shorelines.” Amendments were proposed in 2017 by the Department of Ecology that would have weakened the important “no net loss” provision governing the adoption by Ecology of Shoreline Master Programs. League testified at the public hearing and signed onto a group letter that successfully opposed the weakening of this provision. In 2018, during the DOE update hearings on the Guidelines, League advocated for adding Climate Change Impacts to the SMA including Sea Level Rise.
- **Growth Management Act (GMA)** was adopted in 1990 to place local control on planning for growth. Local jurisdictions must review their Comprehensive Plans under the GMA every 7 years. The Act sets forth criteria for urban and rural areas, protection of natural resources, and designation and protection of Critical Areas. GMA amendments were made in 2017 regarding school siting and short line railroads.
- **Puget Sound Partnership (PSP)** was created by the Legislature in 2007 as the state agency leading the cleanup of Puget Sound.

Summary of Issues for the 2019 Legislative Session

In 2019 we anticipate legislative responses to the Orca Crisis, now under intensive study by the Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force deployed by Governor Jay Inslee’s Executive Order 18-02. Orcas are a keystone species that highlight the interconnectedness of far inland watersheds with the Puget Sound and offshore systems. There is a growing realization that reducing threats to Orcas will require a multi-pronged approach including more strict regulation of existing laws as well as new environmental protections.

The Environmental Priorities Coalition announced adoption of priorities for the 2019 Washington State Legislature, including 100% Clean Energy, the Orca Emergency Response, Oil Spill Prevention, and Reducing Plastic Pollution. The Coalition plans to advance statewide policies to address these priorities and LWVWA will track and support any related bills.

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