



Olympia Yacht Club
Position Paper on Capitol Lake
Adopted May 13, 2009

Position

The Olympia Yacht Club (OYC) strongly supports maintaining Capitol Lake through the Managed Lake Alternative.

After lengthy review and involvement, the OYC has concluded that only with the Managed Lake Alternative as presented in the Capitol Lake Adaptive Management Plan (CLAMP) do we retain Olympia's character, our city waterfront and safe harbor, and an operating port facility. If either of the Estuary Alternatives were selected and put in place, the Olympia community would lose not only Capitol Lake, but would very likely lose Percival Landing, the marinas and other water-dependent activities, and the Port of Olympia's waterfront facility. The public also would lose a significant part of our waterfront culture, our quality of life, and the attractions that are unique and special to Olympia.

OYC Involvement

OYC is a water-dependent, community-based organization that has existed in the same general location since-1904. The marina and facilities are located downtown, on the city waterfront between Percival Landing and the Deschutes waterway. Our organization of approximately 500 members from around the region will be significantly affected by the pending decision.

OYC's position on this issue goes well beyond the impact to our facility. We are a diverse organization made up of many generations of local residents who have been part of the history, culture and development of this region. We are your teachers and small business owners, mariners and electricians, public servants and entrepreneurs. And yes, some of us are ecologists, engineers, lawyers, judges, community activists, historians and natural resource scientists. Some of us were here when the original decision that resulted in the formation of Capitol Lake was made, a thoughtful process that has produced a site of great cultural and social significance. We bring both the expertise and the hindsight to know that creating Capitol Lake was the right decision.

Drawbacks of the Estuary Alternatives

OYC does not believe it is feasible to proceed with either estuary alternatives AND maintain a viable working waterfront and our community's valued water related activities. Issues of concern that OYC wishes to have on the record include:

1. Sedimentation

How the sediment has been and will be managed in the future is a central issue in the current Lake versus Estuary debate.

The Deschutes River system produces and delivers to lower Budd Inlet approximately 35,000 cubic yards of sediment per year (some years less and some years more – for example, significantly more in 2008 and 2009). This natural phenomenon occurs year after year as it has since time immemorial.

Nautical charts from the mid 19th century show that all of lower Budd Inlet was an extensive mud flat at low water. Early settlers of Olympia and Thurston County had to construct *a pier nearly a mile long across these mud flats* to gain access to water depths suitable for navigation.

During the late 19th century, the first of several major dredge operations occurred, funded primarily by the federal government. The dredge spoils were used to fill in the tidelands to create large areas for development of downtown Olympia and the Port area. Dredging also ensured adequate water depth for navigation purposes.

In 1951, the state of Washington created Capitol Lake by constructing the current 5th Avenue dam. The dam reduced the need for major dredging of lower Budd Inlet to maintain water depths needed for navigation, and as a result the city waterfront began evolving into its present form.

Today, as a result of Capitol Lake's existence, we have a bustling working waterfront extending from the Port to Percival Landing. The multiple marinas and the city's Percival Landing provide ideal sheltered moorage for approximately 450 recreational boats, including those permanently moored here by local residents, and visitors from around Puget Sound.

This setting, with its fine restaurants and shops along the Percival Boardwalk, attracts thousands of residents and visitors each year by land and by sea. Percival Landing is a major recreational draw and is the hub for major community events such as the Wooden Boat Festival, Harbor Days and Lakefair.

Are we prepared to allow Budd Inlet to revert back to a mud flat similar to what Olympia's original settlers were faced with? Are we prepared to lose our water access and safe harbor?

2. Unsustainable dredging

All of the amenities described above are at risk with the two proposed Estuary Alternatives. Approximately 900,000 cubic yards of sediment has accumulated in Capitol Lake since 1951. Despite the Estuary options' planned pre-dredge, about half of this accumulated sediment would be flushed into the Percival Landing-City waterfront area if the Capitol Lake dam were removed. Maintaining current water depths along the city waterfront and Percival Landing/Port area would require *dredging every three to five years*. Under the proposed Estuary Alternatives, the responsibility to conduct the necessary dredging to maintain current water depth would be shifted from the state of Washington to the four waterfront marinas, the City of Olympia (Percival Landing), and the Port. This is both impractical and economically unfeasible. The Olympia Yacht Club's estimated cost for its share of the first dredge cycle is approximately *\$4 million - \$6 million*. It is very likely that the other City waterfront operators would be faced with similar costs.

3. Lack of disposal sites

Contamination issues with both the Budd Inlet and Capitol Lake sediments preclude the use of currently designated open water disposal sites. The only disposal sites available presently are upland hazardous waste or upland reclamation sites, which require transportation by truck or rail. There is no rail access to the City waterfront or Percival Landing area. Sediment dewatering and transferring the material onto railcar or truck requires considerable space for the safe operation and maneuvering of heavy equipment. *This would require limiting or restricting public access to the City waterfront for up to six months during dredging operations*. It is difficult to picture how this could occur.

4. Permitting uncertainties

At least 15 governmental and tribal agencies are currently involved in the permit approval process. Permit approval time is highly uncertain. Currently, it is not unusual for the process associated with federal, state and local *permitting to take several years*. Dredging permits stipulate that in-water operation is restricted to certain months of the year or “fishery windows.” This “window” varies by fish species and location. If a dredge operation cannot be completed within a window, in-water operation has to cease and be held in abeyance, usually several months, until the next window.

5. Planning uncertainties

Coordination and cooperation between City, Port and the four private marinas is uncertain. Each operates independently under different authorities, funding scenarios and schedules. Further complicating the situation is the uncertainty of the actual sedimentation rate, which is uneven over the short term. The CLAMP study indicated that *80-85% of the sediment moves downstream in major storm events occurring over only 8% of the time*. Two consecutive years of major storm events such as we experienced in 2008 and 2009 can create major planning, finance, and operational obstacles.

OYC has used the collective expertise of our members to extensively study this issue. It was a sober realization that it is unlikely that the Olympia Yacht Club could continue to exist under the conditions described above. What about the other City Waterfront venues and operators?

6. Major study limitations

The consequences to lower Puget Sound are significant enough to cause any prudent person to pause and consider whether the CLAMP study is sufficient for a decision to be made. We have found several areas of concern with respect to the current study:

- It is too limited in scope in that it does not take into account the watershed as a whole, known as a watershed analysis unit (WAU). We find this remarkable considering the range and significance of activities that will be affected. The study focuses almost entirely on Capitol Lake, while the implementation of the estuary alternatives has regional implications;
- The CLAMP study oversimplifies that an estuary alternative would significantly improve water quality in lower Budd Inlet. This claim is without sufficient evidence given the complex watershed hydrological cycle;
- The study does not adequately address critical issues such as sediment management and other points raised above; and
- There is an overall lack of attention and analysis of the economic, social, and environment impacts of the estuary alternatives to the entire WAU.

The question must be asked, what are the long-term consequences of the Estuary Alternatives? What is it, exactly, about the current situation that brings us a great quality of life, accolades as one of the most beautiful and thriving capital cities, and financial stability, are we trying to “fix” with undoing all that has brought this about? With such limitations identified above, it can only be concluded that a decision to change the current landscape is premature.

Benefits of Maintaining Capitol Lake as a Managed Lake

1. Sediment control

The lake has proven to be an effective sediment trap. It has the capacity to handle the large surges of sediment associated with major flood events. In the past 58 years there have been only two partial dredges in portions of the lake – and there is still sediment storage capacity remaining.

2. Planned dredging

Dredging Capitol Lake can be completed in a planned, predictable, and orderly manner. Whether the permitting process takes one or five years is not critical. The permitting acquisition process is centered in one governmental agency. The dredging cycle is 9-10 years instead of 3-5 years.

3. Disposal sites

Capitol Lake already has good rail access available, making affordable access to upland disposal sites for dredge spoils a significant benefit of the Managed Lake alternative. The area around the lake is relatively undeveloped (as compared to the City waterfront), providing ample room for the assembly and safe operation of heavy equipment. There would be minimal impact to public access.

4. Environmental risk-abatement

Dredging Capitol Lake on a 9-10 year cycle versus dredging lower Budd Inlet on a 3-5 year cycle provides less exposure to an environmental mishap through oil spill or in-water accident.

5. Recreational value

Capitol Lake and lower Budd Inlet provide year round unique recreational and aesthetic values to residents of our community and tourists alike. The lake, with its tranquil water, has been a safe and ideal venue for small craft boating and boating events such as the recent dragon boat races.

6. An iconic heritage

The current landscape with the capitol dome and the reflecting pond has intrinsic value that is just priceless. It has come to represent not only our capital city but the state of Washington. The Managed Lake alternative would actually enhance these important values and uses.

Conclusion

The facts, historical evidence, and experience support the managed lake as the best alternative.

What is at risk is a viable working waterfront within the currently designated harbor area. We do not find evidence that returning Olympia's waterfront to extensive tidal mud-flats will provide a draw for our citizens, businesses and visitors as represented in the idealized artistic renderings. Given the risks and unpredictability of the estuary scenarios, we do not believe a decision in favor of either of the Estuary Alternatives is possible without addressing the issues we have raised and without the benefit of a complete watershed analysis. We look forward to a response to the concerns raised in this position paper.

We ask that you make your determinations based on facts and evidence, and in the best interest of the public good, which we believe to be in support of maintaining Capitol Lake.

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