



2021 Issue Paper: Natural Resources–Shorelines

LWV of the United States Position

Although the LWV of Washington does not have a specific shorelines position, the [LWVUS Impact on Issues 2018-2020](#) states the following position on natural resources: The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that natural resources should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Resources should be conserved and protected to assure their future availability. Pollution of these resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of ecosystems and to protect public health.

Recent Progress

The League participates in shoreline issues associated with Washington State’s 1972 Shoreline Management Act (SMA). The SMA requires cities and counties to implement shoreline master programs regarding streams that flow over 20 cubic feet per second (cfs), marine waters, lakes larger than 20 acres, and associated wetlands. League members have been involved in subsequent appeals, reviews, and revisions.

- In 2017, the League successfully opposed the weakening of the “no net loss” provision, which says that ecological functions should not deteriorate due to permitted development.
- In 2018, the League advocated for adding climate change impacts to the SMA, including sea level rise.
- At the 2019 LWVWA Convention, members adopted a proposal for a two-year study on current shoreline conditions, projections and issues.

The League is addressing the need to respond to conditions threatening shorelines and public waters, such as development affecting public access, declines in water quality, reduction in shoreline habitat for fish and wildlife, stormwater and industrial pollution, and issues associated with industrial aquaculture and wastewater treatment plant spills.

Recent legislative proposals include efforts to address the decline of the state’s Southern Resident Orca and the inability to recover the state’s endangered salmon runs, which can be traced to the lack of rigor in state and local environmental regulations. The argument is that the state’s current “no net loss” approach to environmental standards has failed and that we must institute a “net ecological gain” standard. These are requirements for a development project, policy, plan, development regulation, or activity in which the environmental impacts caused by the development are outweighed by measures to mitigate the impacts.

[HB 2550](#), proposed in 2020, provided for 1) developing a plan to incorporate the “net ecological gain” standard into existing environmental, development, and land use laws (the SMA and the Growth Management Act) and 2) setting as state policy establishing a net ecologic gain standard through state agencies where currently possible. Although the bill did not pass, a budget included a \$256,000 proviso for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to produce a report and make recommendations. Environmental groups are expected to make the “net gain” standard a priority in legislative efforts.

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