

REACHING THE SHORE: PROVIDING SHORELINE PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION THROUGH THE WASHINGTON COASTAL ATLAS

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KEYWORDS: Washington State, public access, shoreline access, coastal atlas, shoreline management, coastal zone management, mapping, GIS, web tools

Washington State's 2500 miles of coastal shoreline are increasingly subject to uses and ownership that restrict public access. Fortunately, legislation passed in the early 70's and embodied in the federal Coastal Zone Management Act and Washington's Coastal Zone Management Program makes the creation and protection of shoreline public access a management priority. Since inception of the CZMP almost 40 years ago, a series of pamphlets, books and other resources have been produced at the local, county and state level cataloging coastal shoreline access sites and features. Such documents provide information on shoreline access, but also to increase public awareness and appreciation of Washington's coastal environment. It has been almost 25 years, however, since Washington's shoreline public access sites have been comprehensively inventoried and up-to-date information made available to planners and the public.

The Washington State Department of Ecology, in cooperation with the Washington Department of Natural Resources recently completed a detailed inventory of state shoreline public access sites and will use the already existing Washington Coastal Atlas as a venue to make this public access information widely available. The Coastal Atlas allows users to visualize geographically linked coastal habitat data, shoreline physical features, state regulatory features, satellite imagery, nautical charts, aerial photos and other coastal features for the entire state. Public access information will be incorporated into the Coastal Atlas and presented to the public as an interactive map tool including photographs and other site specific information. Like the other features of the Coastal Atlas, the new public access tool will be available to state and federal agencies, Tribal governments, researchers, consultants, and the general public.

The public access inventory was developed using a geographic information system (GIS) to link information about the geographic location, area, and ownership of public shorelines. The inventory will act as the base data layer for the shoreline access web tool and additional data, such as types of access (e.g. visual, pedestrian, vehicle, boat, etc.), site features and amenities (e.g. boat ramps, docks, restrooms, campsites, trails, etc.) will be added as they are collected. Input from local shoreline planners and resource managers will be solicited in order to identify specific needs for public access information. Examples from existing public access websites (e.g. Oregon Coastal Atlas) and input from their development teams will inform the design of the Coastal Atlas's public access tool.

In order to assess use of the new public access tool and other expanded and enhanced features of the Washington Coastal Atlas, an online survey targeting primary user groups will be developed and the results will be used to make any needed adjustments, improvements or additions to the web tools.

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