

SAN JUAN COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL BOARD

F-I-N-A-L MINUTES

Friday, November 7, 2025

9:00 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.

Meeting Held Remotely Via Teams

and at the Orcas Senior Center, 62 Henry Road, Eastsound, WA 98245

PRESENT: William Rupp, Chair (Area 2); Todd Goldsmith, Vice-Chair (Area 3); James Frampton, Secretary (Area 4); Caitie Blethen, WSU Extension Director (ex officio); Kari McVeigh, Council Liaison (District One); and staff members Andrew Munson and Jason Ontjes.

ABSENT: Adam Martin (Area 5) and Susan Eshelman (SJC Environmental Stewardship).

Meeting brought to order at 9:23 AM.

1. Review and approval of the meeting minutes of October 3, 2025. The board lacked a quorum of eligible members to hold the vote, so it will be added to the December 5th agenda.
2. Updates from Environmental Stewardship (Susan). Due to illness, Susan missed the meeting, but Jason read aloud her email on recent Environmental Stewardship happenings. Andrew added to her comments about the Lopez Village bioswale project, indicating it had been a “weedy mess”, but that supplemental plantings of native species (500-600 plants) had taken place this week, and more would be planted in December. A lot of roadside gravel has spilled over the swale, so drought-tolerant natives may prove successful in this environment. Poison hemlock, tansy ragwort, Canada thistle, and other weeds have added to the challenge.

9:30—9:45 AM. Public comment time for visitors. No members of the public attended the meeting, though the transfer station operators were invited.

3. News from the field (Andrew). Andrew said that his weed control focus on Lopez has shifted to woody species like spurge laurel, Scot’s broom and the like, and that rosette-forming weeds like poison hemlock, tansy ragwort and thistles are popping up again. He worked with Michele on a spurge laurel site

recently. Andrew is seeking further feedback from fire chiefs on the draft flame-weeding document, which is considered a potentially effective weed control tool for annual species like shiny geranium, he said. Jason added that he and Troy had done some OPALCO easement weed control recently on Orcas, as well as some work for State Parks. Michele was attending the weed conference in Wenatchee and was not available for comment on her recent field work.

4. Presentation and discussion of the monthly report (Jason). Jason took questions from the Board on the monthly report. Caitie repeated that Michele had authored a piece on English holly in their “Ask a Master Gardener” newsletter recently. This year’s Ag Summit will take place on San Juan Island on Feb. 27-28, with workshops on plant pathology and reducing plastic in agriculture. Also, the native plant sale is coming up, and Jane Wentworth (a Master Gardener and botanist), will present a webinar on how these native species can be used in the garden. Andrew mentioned that he collaborated recently with the SJC Master Gardeners on a question about organic methods of control for field bindweed. Caitie suggested there could be another article in the newsletter that would describe those methods (Andrew agreed to be the author).
5. 2026-2027 Council Budget Presentation (Jason). Jason briefly recounted his budget presentation to Council earlier this week, indicating that no cuts had been asked of the Noxious Weed Department, given that it does not derive its budget from current expense funds. Kari said that “the County is in a really bad place” in the next two years. The 32-hour work week was an attempt to stave off the practice of eating cash from current expense, and looking at every efficiency across departments is not enough to balance the budget over the next two years: you need to shed positions, which will mean loss of service. Once the community absorbs the news of these cuts, it can decide what services it wants the County to provide, which will then open discussions of how to pay for those services, such as a levy lid lift.
6. Weed disposal 2025 totals and potential policy changes (Jason). Jason recounted the year-end budget numbers for noxious weed disposal by island, noting that Orcas billed for significantly more than Lopez or Shaw over the past year. The \$15,000 annual disposal budget was overspent by over a

thousand dollars, and the program was therefore shut down three months early for 2025. In a particularly bad year for weeds, he said that on Orcas, it was common practice for people to bring in loads just below the \$300 or 6-can limit in order to avoid cost, and that there were cases of people bringing in multiple loads like Scot's broom or gorse. Some of these loads were brought in by professional landscape maintenance companies. Todd suggested again that our department should reach out to these professionals each winter to go over top-10 weed identification and best practices on disposal methods, and that he could personally reach out to such companies on Lopez. He did not want the Board to make any policy changes that would discourage people from controlling noxious weeds on private property, yet he favored the idea of contractors providing their clients' contact information as a potential way to cut down on free commercial loads. Todd recommended that each transfer station operator be invited to the Board's December meeting to offer their feedback. The Board did not think that further restricting the number of species allowed for free disposal would be helpful. A 75:25 public/private cost split was also briefly discussed.

7. OPALCO letter outcome. Jason said that he had not heard from OPALCO since the letter was sent last month regarding noxious weeds and recent powerline easement clearings. Andrew said he would keep an eye out on whether OPALCO's board planned to have this on the agenda at their upcoming meeting (Nov. 20?). Todd suggested a more proactive approach and volunteered to reach out to Brian Silverstein, the OPALCO board member representing Lopez. Andrew said it was difficult to find examples of easement agreements, though he had made some progress working with Public Works' Eric Stone. Many paper records remain off-line and are challenging to locate. To date, OPALCO has not explicitly acknowledged its responsibility for noxious weed control in the powerline rights-of-way. The coop has been willing, however, to pay for the department's efforts to control noxious weeds in these areas, though Andrew believed that our staff would be unable to make much of a difference given the ongoing nature and scale of the problem. He emphasized preventative measures like overseeding disturbed ground and mowing higher. "Keep up the pressure, keep it on their plate", he said, in order to influence their management decisions.
8. Other business. Answering Bill's question on the proposed Orkila contract,

Jason said that no deal had been struck due to disagreement on the legal language within the draft. Neither side has given any ground, so a contract seems very unlikely. Caitie said that a WSU professor, Casandra Bates, will soon speak on San Juan about plant pathology and could also lecture on pesticides if a course were desired on that subject. Todd requested that the discussion on property assessment fees and land classifications be brought up at next month's board meeting.

9. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 11:06 AM.

The Board's next scheduled meeting is on Friday, December 5, 2025.