

# Community Perspectives on Environmental Aspects of Planning

FEBRUARY 2025



Presented by Marnie Jackson, WEAN Executive Director  
Photos by Linda LaMar, WEAN Vice Chair





# LESSONS FROM OUR CBO CONSORTIUM WORK

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- Working from different perspectives with common goals
  - Weaving interconnected issues, priorities, needs, and solutions
  - Seeking diverse and historically marginalized perspectives
  - Looking for “yes, and”
  - The process is a product



# LESSONS FROM SURVEYED COMMUNITY

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## *WEAN'S Environment and Planning Survey*

This brief survey provided a chance for community to share perspectives on the environmental issues of concern, ecosystems of importance, and places worthy of care.

Fewer than half of survey respondents heard about the survey through WEAN's website and newsletter, while more than half heard about it through Island County, the Whidbey News Times, the South Whidbey Record, or other channels.

Results from this survey will be shared in today's presentation.

## *Consortium's BIPOC Engagement & Surveying*

With WEAN, Island Roots Housing, and Agricultural Resources Committee of Island County, contractor Mary Elizabeth Himes and subcontractor Maria Diaz engaged in both open-ended and survey-driven dialog with community members of Color.

Questions were presented in a variety of methods and languages, including written/spoken, online/in person, English/Spanish/Tagalog.

Feedback about the survey was at least as informative as survey results themselves.

# ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING: LOCATION OF RESPONDENTS

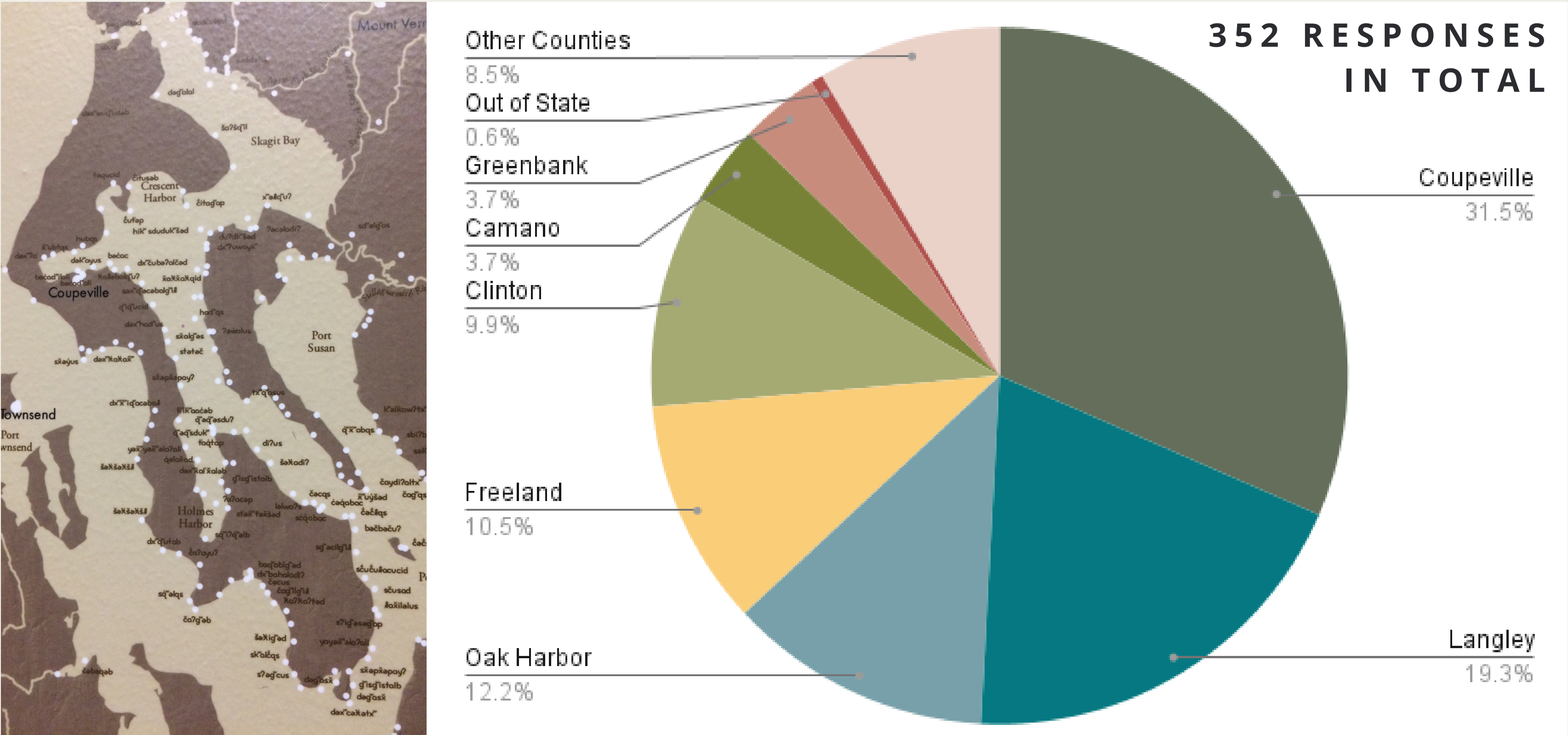
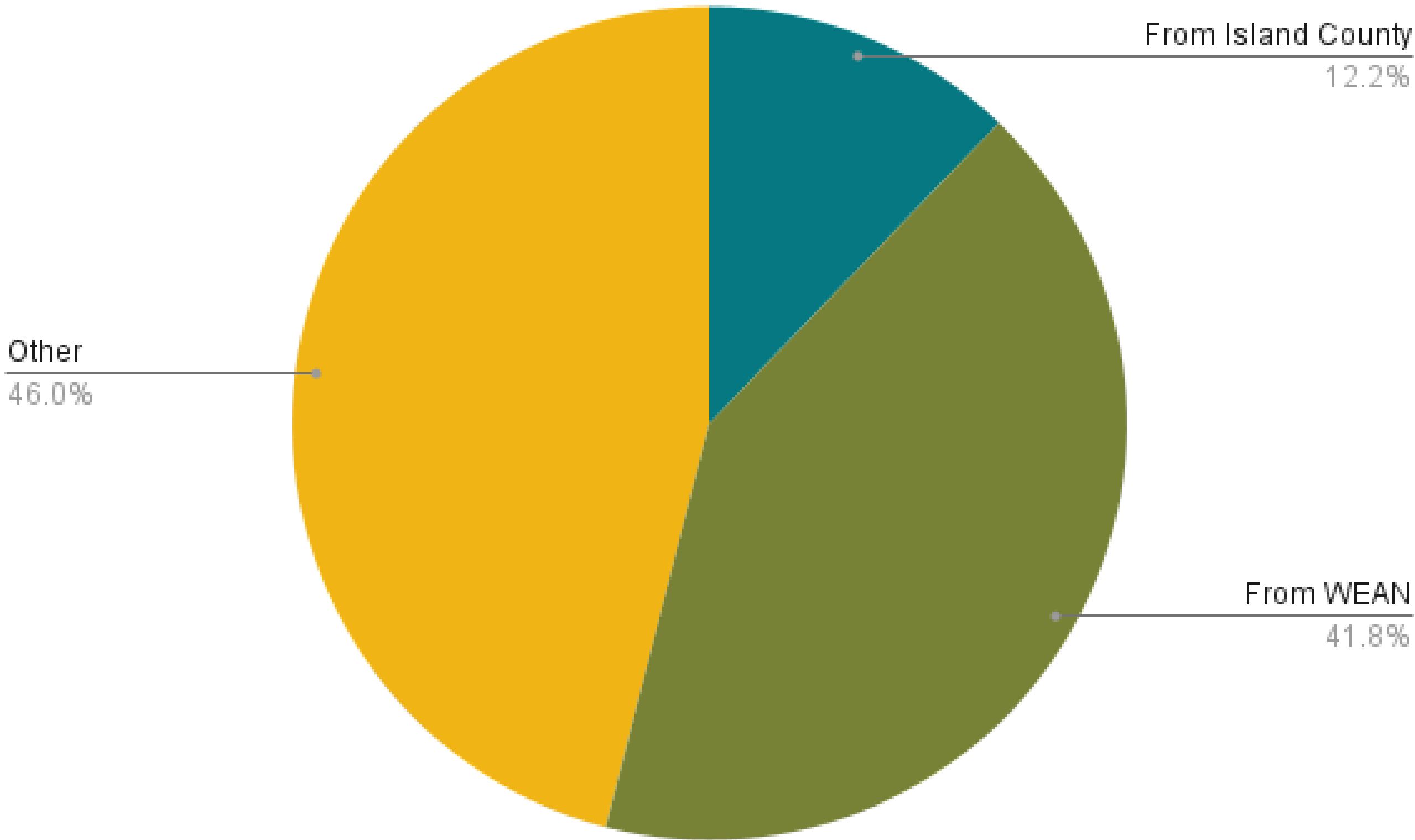


Photo of an exhibit of indigenous place names, from Hibulb Cultural Center



# HOW RESPONDENTS LEARNED OF THIS SURVEY OPPORTUNITY





PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO ARE “VERY” OR “SOMEWHAT” CONCERNED WITH:

98.58%	Groundwater Contamination
92.90%	Habitat Decline
90.63%	Aquifer Recharge
90.34%	Wetland Loss
89.49%	Stream Health
87.50%	Farmland Loss

83.52%	Natural and Climate Disasters
82.39%	Growler Noise
81.82%	Beach Loss
81.53%	Invasive Weeds
80.97%	Prairie Loss
76.70%	Fireworks
75.85%	Logging



# AREAS WITH STRONGEST “VERY CONCERNED” RESPONSE

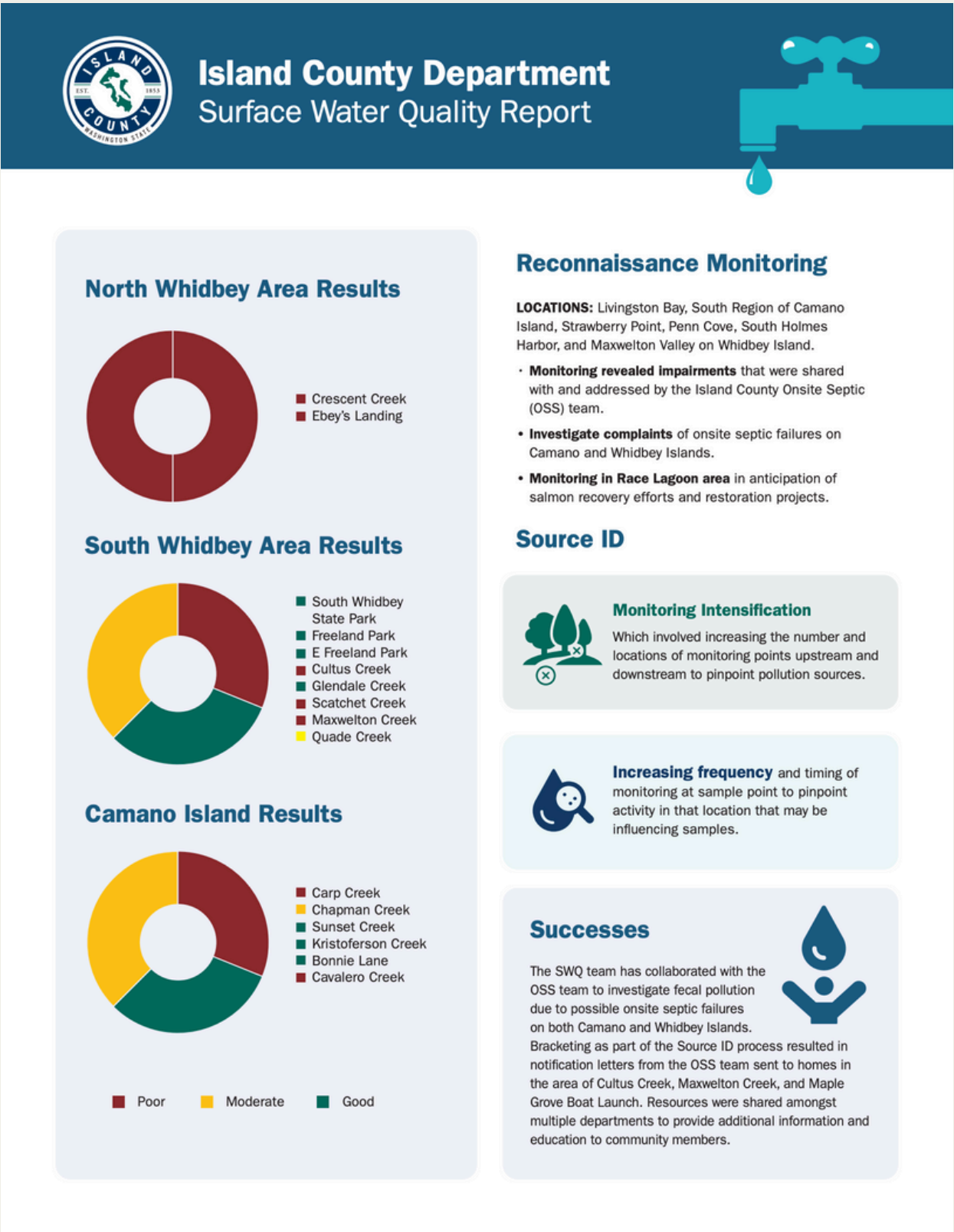
76.1% are "very concerned" about groundwater contamination.
69.3% are "very concerned" about habitat decline.
61.1% are "very concerned" about growler noise.
60.2% are "very concerned" about wetland loss.
58.5% of respondents are "very concerned" about aquifer recharge.
55.7% are "very concerned" about stream health.



9 out of 10 respondents were “very” or “somewhat” concerned about groundwater contamination, habitat decline, aquifer recharge, and wetland loss. Other areas of heightened concern are growler noise, farmland loss, and stream health. Notably, ZERO respondents selected “not at all concerned” about stream health—every single respondent had some level of concern.



# CONCERNS ABOUT STREAM HEALTH SHARED BY COUNTY



### Reconnaissance Monitoring

**LOCATIONS:** Livingston Bay, South Region of Camano Island, Strawberry Point, Penn Cove, South Holmes Harbor, and Maxwellton Valley on Whidbey Island.

- **Monitoring revealed impairments** that were shared with and addressed by the Island County Onsite Septic (OSS) team.
- **Investigate complaints** of onsite septic failures on Camano and Whidbey Islands.
- **Monitoring in Race Lagoon area** in anticipation of salmon recovery efforts and restoration projects.

### Source ID



#### Monitoring Intensification

Which involved increasing the number and locations of monitoring points upstream and downstream to pinpoint pollution sources.



#### Increasing frequency

and timing of monitoring at sample point to pinpoint activity in that location that may be influencing samples.

### Successes

The SWQ team has collaborated with the OSS team to investigate fecal pollution due to possible onsite septic failures on both Camano and Whidbey Islands. Bracketing as part of the Source ID process resulted in notification letters from the OSS team sent to homes in the area of Cultus Creek, Maxwellton Creek, and Maple Grove Boat Launch. Resources were shared amongst multiple departments to provide additional information and education to community members.



Concerns about stream health were discussed in detail by county commissioners and health department staff at a March 13, 2024 work session. These survey results may in part show that the county has succeeded in educating the public about this out-of-balance aspect of ecosystem care.

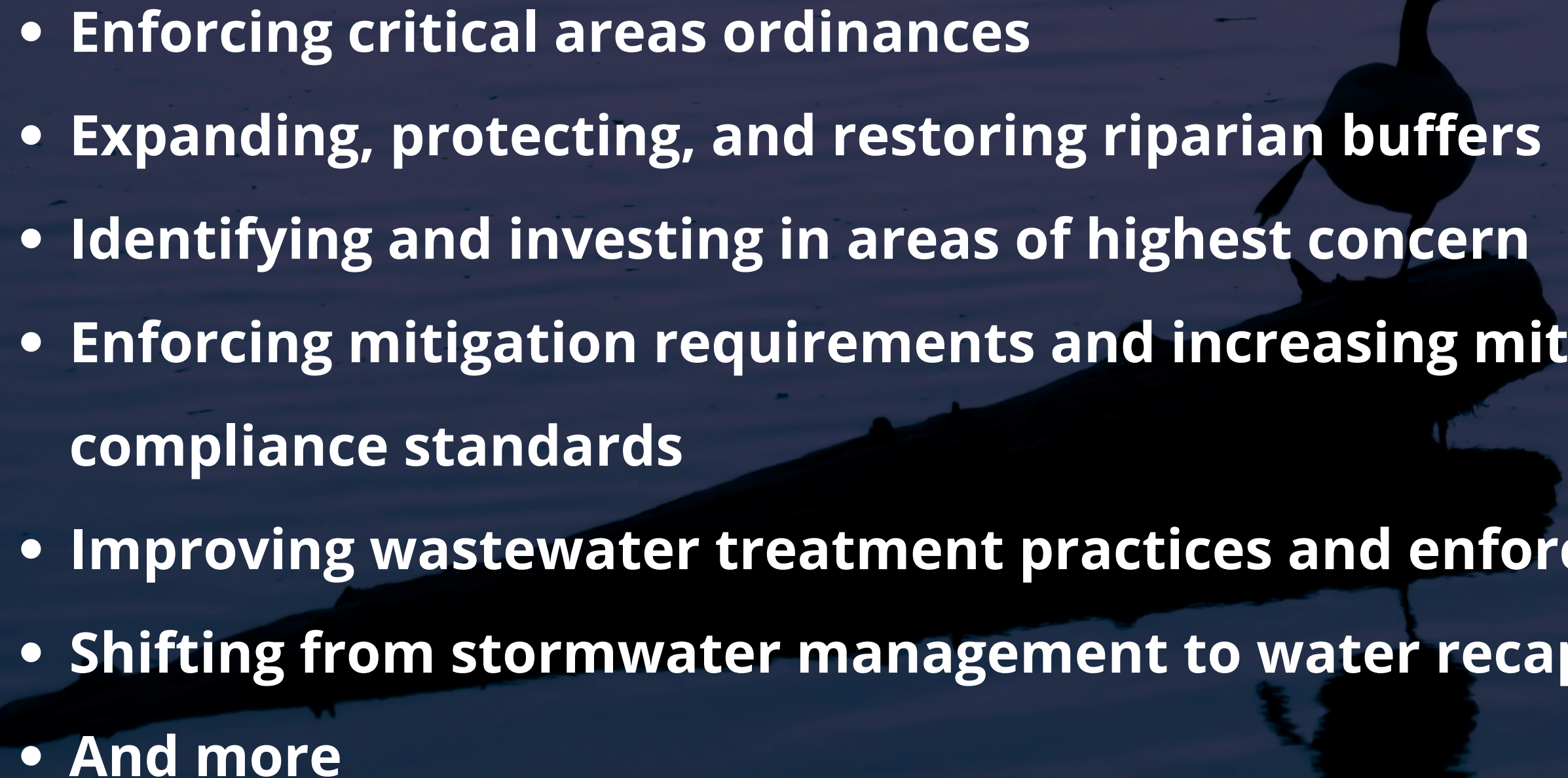
To see the Island County Surface Water Quality Monitoring Program 2022-2023 Annual Report, visit [https://www.islandcountywa.gov/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/\\_03132024-717](https://www.islandcountywa.gov/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_03132024-717)

*“The data are ‘pretty horrifying,’ Commissioner Melanie Bacon said at the March 13 Island County work session. ‘This is saying we have as many bad as we have good, and so it seems to me this is something we should be addressing in our comp plan.’”*  
—Whidbey News Times, March 26, 2024



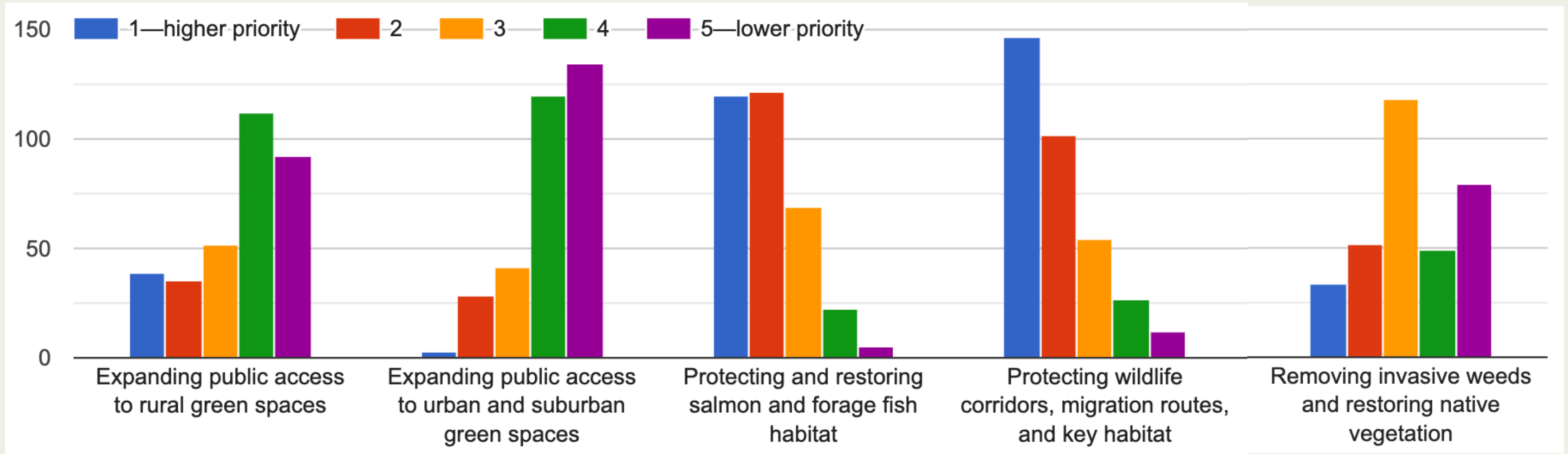
# OPPORTUNITIES IN STREAM & WETLAND PROTECTION

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- Enforcing critical areas ordinances
  - Expanding, protecting, and restoring riparian buffers
  - Identifying and investing in areas of highest concern
  - Enforcing mitigation requirements and increasing mitigation compliance standards
  - Improving wastewater treatment practices and enforcement
  - Shifting from stormwater management to water recapture
  - And more



# PROTECTING WILDLIFE CORRIDORS, MIGRATION ROUTES, KEY HABITAT THE HIGHEST PRIORITY OF RESPONDENTS

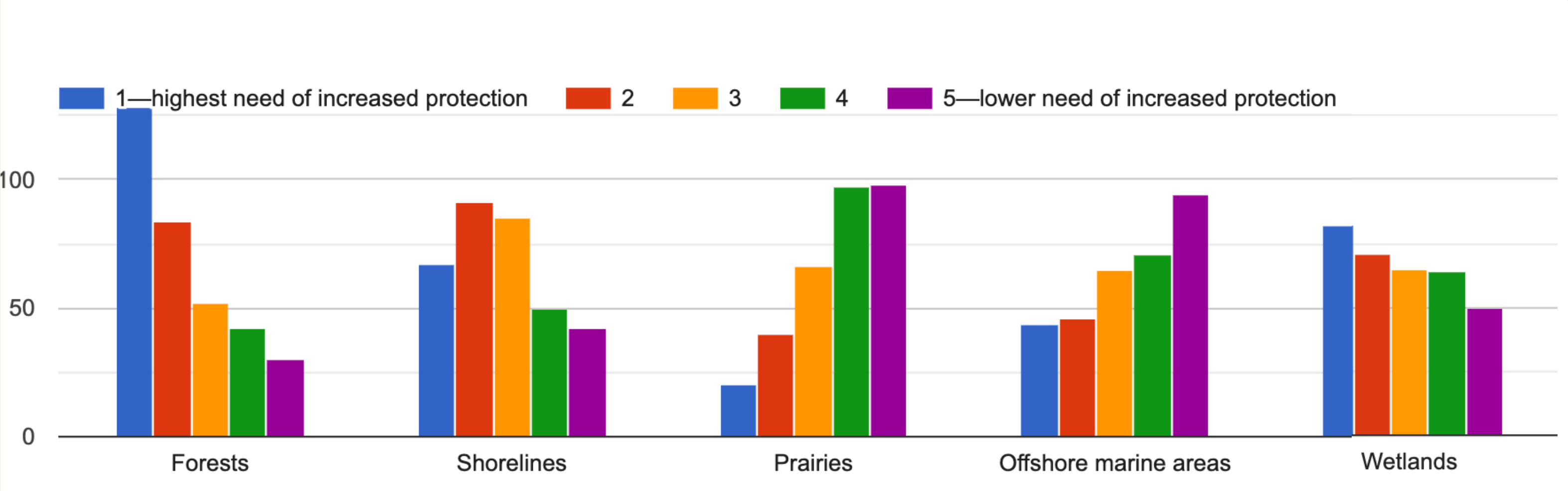


The second highest priority conservation action for survey respondents was protecting and restoring salmon & forage fish habitat.





# FORESTS IDENTIFIED AS IN HIGHEST NEED OF INCREASED PROTECTION BY MORE THAN 1/3 OF RESPONDENTS



Wetlands were identified by one in four respondents as the ecosystem in highest need of increased protection; shorelines by one in five.





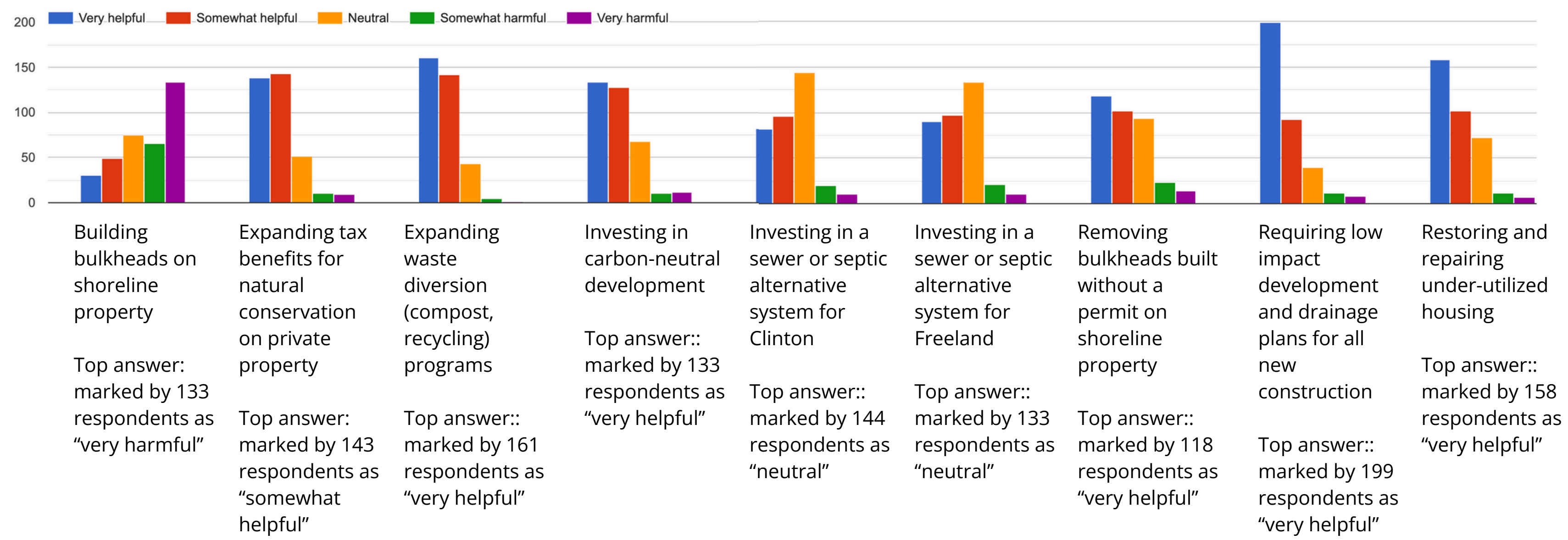
# OPPORTUNITIES IN FOREST & AQUIFER PROTECTION

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- **Reforming PBRS & CFF to incentivize conservation**
- **Expanding Critical Drainage Areas**
- **Prohibiting lifting development moratoria on logged land**
- **Advocating to Washington State for island-specific considerations**
- **Incentivizing restoration of contiguous and interconnected habitat**
- **Monitoring the health and habitat of indicator species populations**
- **Improving utilities and infrastructure**
- **And more**



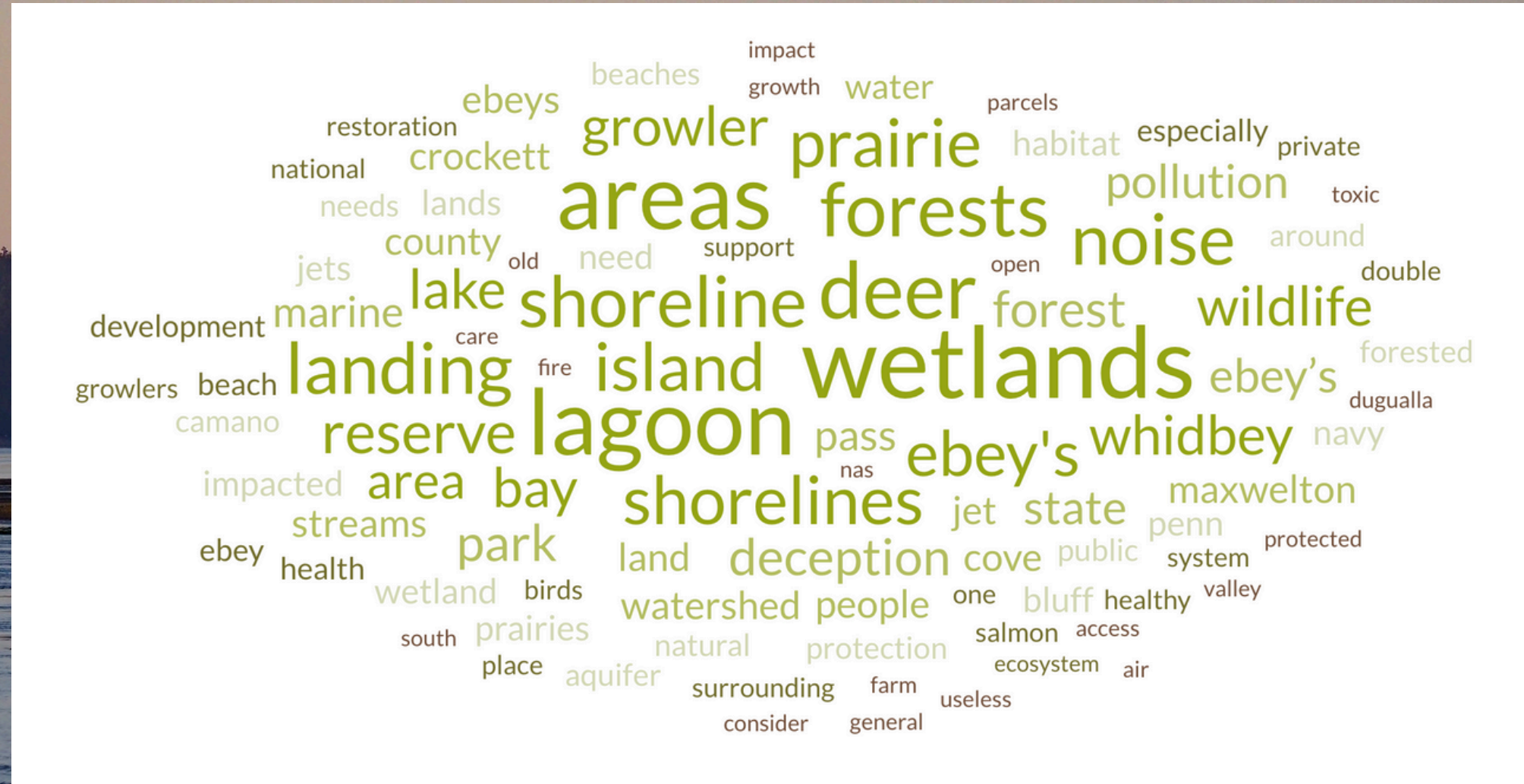
# REQUIRING LOW-IMPACT DEVELOPMENT AND DRAINAGE PLANS FOR ALL NEW CONSTRUCTION A PREFERRED STRATEGY, MARKED “VERY HELPFUL” BY 199 (56.5% OF) RESPONDENTS





# HIGHLIGHTING AREAS OF CONSERVATION NEED

Deer Lagoon, Maxwellton wetlands, Holmes Harbor, Penn Cove, and more were highlighted as in need of restoration. Full list of ecosystems and places highlighted as in need of care will be shared via email.





# EXAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM SURVEY RESPONDENTS

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*What processes are in place to protect our shoreline areas from hard armoring?*

*What can be done to improve the enforcement of Island County environmental regulations?*

*How are we going to plan for managed retreat from coastal areas that are or will be experiencing more flooding?*

*How are we going to encourage second-home owners to stop doing short term rentals, making their housing available for working families of Island County?*

*How are we going to allow for smaller home or unconventional housing to be built in urban growth areas?*

*How will you mitigate the noise emitted by the Navy's Growler jets?\**

*How do you intend to implement protections for listed species and habitats?*

*How are marine life and marine shores cared for?*

\*A significant majority of questions related to jet noise, and a desire to understand Island County's willingness and ability to intervene and protect community from Growler noise and pollution.



# TAKEAWAYS: STRATEGIES FOR GREATER ENGAGEMENT

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## *Look for common goals*

Farmers, environmental advocates, and affordable housing advocates share the goals of enhancing community infrastructure to support health, increase resilience, and more equitably enhance the best qualities of our islands.

## *Seek needed voices*

Our laws, policies, and previous comprehensive plans—in Island County and around the state—have disproportionately been shaped by people with identities of privilege. Some voices are missing from the conversation.

## *Host creative space*

Our community has changed a lot since 2016 and will continue to change. Circumstances—including climate change—require us to become more nimble, adaptive, regenerative, and interdependent. We need creativity in planning.

## *The process is a product*

Time, space, and thoughtful design for collaborative and inclusive dialog is, in itself, an exercise in being the kind of community we need—well-resourced, interconnected, and moving together toward a healthy, equitable, and resilient future.



# Questions?

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Email [ed@whidbeyenvironment.org](mailto:ed@whidbeyenvironment.org) with any questions that can't be answered today.