



Friends *of the* San Juans

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Received at Joint CC/AC
Hearing re: Population from
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San Juan County
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Public Testimony – Hearing for the San Juan County Comprehensive Land Use Population Analysis Plan forecasts for SJC

Dear San Juan County Council Members and Planning Commissioners,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit comments on the San Juan County Comprehensive Land Use Population Analysis Plan forecasts for SJC for the 20 year planning period (“Population Analysis”).

FRIENDS of the San Juans (“FRIENDS”) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization established in 1979 to protect and restore the San Juan Islands and the Salish Sea for people and nature. We represent over 2,000 members and use science, policy, law, education, and citizen activism to protect, preserve, and restore the land, water, and sea of the San Juan archipelago. Our members live, work, and recreate in the San Juan Islands.

Population sets the pace for all of the elements of the comprehensive plan: Governance, Land Use, Shoreline Management, Water Resources; Housing, Transportation, Capital Facilities, Utilities, Historic and Archeological Preservation, Economic Development Administration, Parks Trails and Natural Areas Plan.

FRIENDS offers the following two concerns for deliberation at today’s hearing:

1. Use of reliable population data that capture our County from peak summer visitors;
2. Use of Current Population Data

1. Peak population is inadequately addressed in the county’s population projection.

Visitor Population

On page 36 of the April 11, 2017 San Juan County Comprehensive Landuse Plan Population projections Technical Memorandum states a report from Dean Runyan and Associates model indicated that San Juan County had 813,000 visitors who spent approximately \$203 million in 2015. The report shows that approximately 125,000 visitors stay with resident friends or relatives.¹ If accurate, this represents a 40 fold increase in our base population during peak season.

Thankfully we are not alone, and there are many other tourist destination communities around the US that have completed forecasting and analysis and DCD should complete a technical memorandum on findings from these communities.

¹ Dean Runyan Associates for the Washington Tourism Alliance, 2015.

The San Juan Islands are a major tourist destination, with increasing use and impacts that threaten the quality of life for residents and visitors. Several local, state, federal and non-governmental organizations manage parks, protected areas, or recreational facilities, have formed a Cooperative Action Plan to manage visitor use to protect and enhance visitor experiences. They have formed the Visitor Management Workshop and Assessment with initial seed funding provided by the National Park Service.

Similarly a complimentary process is being conducted by the San Juan Visitor Bureau to help manage visitor use in the San Juan Islands.

Both of these studies need to be integrated in a technical memorandum on visitor population trends and forecasts in the County's Population Projections work.

Additionally, data from each of the ports (private and public) should be included in population forecasts for

For example, 2016 marina statistics from the Port of Friday Harbor reported:

- Transportation vessels such as Clipper, Puget Sound Express, Pacific Cruises 62,812 passengers
- Cruise ships and pocket cruise ships 2,719
- Overnight guest moorage 13,400 – this is the vessel count not the passenger count. We do not have passenger count per vessel but you can safely say the majority have 2 or more passengers
- Locally based whale watch, excursion, charter, fishing vessels 32,675 passengers (these passengers would probably be counted elsewhere in a visitor numbers survey as coming by ferry or float plane).

2. Use New OFM Population.

OFM will be releasing its updated population projections in three months. The County should consider holding off selecting its 2036 population projection until after OFM releases are released in September. This may also correspond with initial data release from other Visitor studies.

I hope that our county will take the time and effort to integrate the best information we have to navigate these important decisions with the assistance of topic experts, and industry leaders.

We look forward to a robust public process.

Stephanie Buffum, Executive Director