

Whatcom County Candidates

Candidate responses were not edited by Whatcom Watch.

Candidates were asked to keep their answers to 100 words or less.

Candidates reviewed their answers in the layout before the paper was sent to the printer.

Background: In October 2016, the Washington State Supreme Court found that Whatcom County's Comprehensive Plan fails to protect water quality and the availability of water. The Washington State Department of Ecology's November 14, 2016, letter to Whatcom County Executive Jack Louws states that "instream flows have not been met on average 142 days per year [up from 100 days per year in Ecology's 2011 Focus on Water Availability], and there are no years when instream flows have been fully met."

How would you resolve the varied demands on the county's seasonal water supply to balance the needs of farms and nourish healthy salmon populations?

Background: In 1998, Lake Whatcom was listed as an impaired water body for dissolved oxygen and phosphorus under section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act. Nineteen years have elapsed since then and the water quality has further deteriorated as evidenced by the ongoing monitoring studies by the Institute of Watershed Studies at Western Washington University. According to the draft study by the Washington State Department of Ecology, a 74 percent reduction in developed watershed land would be required to return Lake Whatcom's phosphorus loadings to natural levels. Lake Whatcom water quality continues to slowly deteriorate.

What actions do you propose to stabilize and even increase the lake's water quality?

Background: Farms in Whatcom County employ thousands of seasonal migrant workers to work their fields, especially berry farmers.

What role, if any, do you believe the county plays in balancing the labor needs of farms with the increasing pressure from the federal government to reduce the number of undocumented or improperly documented immigrants?

Whatcom County Council — At-Large

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Barry Buchanan acknowledged receipt of the questions. When his answers were not received by deadline a follow-up message was left on his answering machine.



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We could work on two problems at the same time. We always have flooding around Slater Road in the spring from the Nooksack River. With the continued change of our climate, we could be seeing more flooding as the snow pack melts. I would look at investing flood tax money (along with state grants) in building a reservoir to capture and store that excess water we have in the spring, and then divert it back in the summer months when we have low instream flows.

We should continue the programs in place to limit run off and the phosphorus in our lake. Buying out all the homes that surround Lake Whatcom would make the lake more like a pristine reservoir but that is not financially feasible for the county. What we need to do is make sure that any environmental program is delivering results for the monies budgeted.

I have heard Sherriff Elfo speak to the issue of immigration and undocumented immigrants. I agree with the Sherriff's position that there is no need for local law enforcement to be proactively involved in immigration issues. There are enough Border Patrol Agents in our area to do their job, and the Sherriff's department can focus on their job. They are not Border Patrol Agents. The Sherriff's office complies with the law as to undocumented immigrants and that approach should continue.

Whatcom County Council — District 1



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Water is the most important currency in the world, and balancing the needs of Families, Farms and Fish is not easy. Our residents want us to manage our fiscal and water budgets in a way that treats our environment carefully and protects the right for everyone to live within it fairly. I created a detailed solution that addresses this issue that allows well users to store winter water for summer time mitigation. Rooted in science, this approach promotes water conservation, respects tribal treaties and senior water rights, trackable instream flows and acknowledges water as a finite resource. See: www.voterudbrowne.com/water

The County could and should do more to protect Lake Whatcom; the challenge is finding a source for the many millions of additional dollars required. Government has to follow the law when regulating what happens on private property so our best and cheapest tool is educating residents living around the Lake about the importance of being good stewards of the land. I am encouraged by the many that I have seen doing this already. New technology will also be needed to help us identify the origin of the large number of small sources of pollution impacting the Lake.

As an immigrant and former multinational business owner I am very aware of the social and financial concerns about legal and illegal immigration, especially our treatment of the Dreamers. I know many people want the County to get involved in farm labor and immigration issues and some may even incorrectly claim that we have the authority to do so. The truth is the County government has very limited authority related to labor or immigration. The County only has the legal right to get involved in these matters if it relates to a health, sanitation or public safety situation.



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The measurement for instream flows was always intended to be an average measurement over time and the Department of Ecology is interpreting the instream flows to a time specific measurement, not an average. When you take a streamflow reading when the flow is below average at a specific time and ignore the overall average readings, ecology extremists always skew the results to create a problem which may not be realistic.

The City of Bellingham continues to introduce phosphorus laden water into Lake Whatcom on a weekly basis from the middle fork of the Nooksack River to meet the drinking water needs of the community. Reducing the introduction of this Nooksack river middle fork foreign water to Lake Whatcom would mitigate some of the developed watershed issues.

None-The foreign immigration labor issue is the business of the State and Federal Government.

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What role, if any, do you believe the county plays in balancing the labor needs of farms with the increasing pressure from the federal government to reduce the number of undocumented or improperly documented immigrants?

Whatcom County Council — District 2



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With a realistic perspective that water is finite, that many users do not have legal rights to water, and with the perspective that while the water quantity problem is seasonal the water quality problem is year-round. Any solution will require a change in state legislation, but any state legislative change cannot alter the tribes' position as having senior rights, nor can a legislative change alter the fact that water is finite in summer and increased conservation and mitigation efforts will likely be needed in order to resume issuing permits to landowners dependent on exempt wells.

We must accelerate our efforts to improve water quality. The 50-year plan is too slow, and current funding even for that plan is inadequate. We also need an equitable funding source for programs that mitigate stormwater runoff into Lake Whatcom, such as a watershed-based stormwater utility or a flood subzone district. We must consider raising the flood/stormwater tax to maintain or expand our current levels service for the Homeowners Incentive Program and other policies that improve water quality in Lake Whatcom, Drayton Harbor, Birch Bay and Portage Bay.

Whatcom County government should promote a community where undocumented, improperly documented and DACA immigrants feel safe when interacting with our schools, businesses, public health agents, and local law enforcement. This is why I have proposed a discussion of the "Keep Whatcom Families Working Act." The Act proposes that County resources should be prohibited from being used for immigration enforcement, that County services should be provided regardless of immigration status, and that County law enforcement shall not detain people based on perceived or actual immigration status.



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We must begin by measuring the water that goes in to the river. Then can we determine how to best deal with this issue. A combination of conservation, rain water retention, limits on residential well water usage and tying in to community water associations are measures that would help. Two years have past since the Hirst ruling. We own it to the people who were building and already have wells, to get them water. What we cant do is dishonor the treaties we have with our Native neighbors that provides them with first rights to the water.

If we cannot get enough homeowners to voluntarily switch to designs that reduce runoff in to the lake, then we start with incentives and then as homes get sold, we require changes in the lawns (with incentives). The City and County can also increase purchasing of land to buffer between homes and the lake and lastly, we cannot build any new resorts or large properties that will dredge some of the lake and increase the pollutants that get in the lake via new growth. This is our drinking water and we have to stop developing around it.

I believe the counties responsibility is to the residents of the county, including farm workers that are seasonal and undocumented residents. All immigrants must know that the county and our law enforcement will not ask or use any information they receive in the course of their jobs to assist the Federal Government (ICE) in rounding up residents that we care about and rely on in Whatcom County. That is an essential requirement if we are to expect victims of crime and witnesses of crimes to come forward and it is the humane and right thing to do.

Whatcom County Council — District 3



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People have made investments based on the way the system was functioning, but that system was broken This needs to be sorted out. I don't have all the solutions, but a few premises that I would start with: treaties must be kept; promises to citizens should be kept; long term resources should be protected. And while not everyone will be happy, we should have a process that everyone agrees is fair.

The county should do more to clean up Lake Whatcom. I learned some really impressive things about rainwater catchment and stormwater management at the Bellingham to Bay Symposium. To me it makes very good sense, that rainwater, especially during a heavy rain doesn't readily soak into the ground, rather, it flows over it and can cause damage, runoff and erosion. If the heavy rain could be diverted into a storm vault or other system it could then be cleaned and released back into the ground at a rate that could be absorbed.

Whatcom County continues to be a place where many workers, both documented and undocumented, are employed. We should follow the city of Bellingham's lead with regard to federal immigration laws. We should make sure that a path to citizenship is clearly identified and that people have the support they need to become citizens. People must feel comfortable reporting crime. I don't want criminals to be overlooked because victims and witnesses may fear revealing their citizenship status.

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Tyler Byrd acknowledged receipt of the questions.