

West Elwha Beach Stewardship



Project reporting period: 10/01/2024 – 9/30/2025

Grant number: SEANWS-2023-CICoCD-00005



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1. Abstract

Dog feces represent a growing threat to water quality, particularly on beaches and shorelines. The Clallam County Marine Resources Committee (CCMRC) began focusing on reducing fecal bacteria pollution from dog feces after their intern observed and documented dog (and human waste) on Elwha Beach. While the main goal of the Elwha Beach Stewardship project is to improve water quality in the Elwha estuary, the CCMRC also aims to foster community stewardship. To accomplish this, the CCMRC sponsored a SaniKan and dog waste station at the Elwha Beach trailhead. Additionally, the CCMRC conducted on-foot surveys recording dog poop presence and created a digital questionnaire on visitor beach-use which was advertised with a sign and QR code on the waste facilities. In this project reporting period (October 2024 – September 2025), a total of 5,400 dog waste bags were distributed at the Elwha Beach trailhead. Questionnaire results indicated that most beach trail users were locals, had heard about the beach through word-of-mouth, and appreciated the waste facilities. On-foot surveys revealed lower amounts of dog poop left behind compared to prior years. Going forward, this project is funded by a grant from the North Olympic Development Council for the period of October 2025 – September 2027, and the CCMRC will evaluate future stewardship plans.

2. Project Goals

- Goal 1: Protect and improve water quality and contribute to nearshore habitat and species protection.
- Goal 2: Encourage community stewardship.

3. Project Engagement

3.1. Partners/Organizations

The local Surfriders chapter also sponsored a SaniKan and dog waste receptacle at the other end of the parking lot.



Varied community use of the Elwha beach. Photo credit: Helle Andersen

4. Project Methods/Actions

Project Activity Summary	Date or Period
Sponsorship of SaniKan	Ongoing
On-foot survey and dog waste bag refill	Twice monthly during the reporting period
Digital QR-code questionnaire	June 23, 2024 - current (n=31 for this reporting period)



Access trail on top of the dike with the river and estuary on the right (tribal owned) and Dudley Pond on the left (private owned). This dike is walked during each on-foot survey to count dog poops left behind. Photo credit: Helle Andersen

On-Foot Surveys

CCMRC conducts on-foot surveys twice monthly to document beach conditions, cars using the parking lot, the number of unbagged dog poops seen, and the number of dog waste bags replaced on that visit. Survey days are randomly selected from within volunteer availability, and ensuring they are conducted every month allows for some observation of seasonal shifts. A full list of the data that is collected is available on the data sheet in Appendix 3.

Digital Questionnaire

Since June 2024, the CCMRC has displayed a QR code for a digital questionnaire regarding beach use. This is installed on brightly colored vinyl signage inside the door of the SaniKan, and on the dog waste station. The survey asks users several questions regarding their use of the beach (see Appendix 1 for questions). Because respondents self-select whether they scan the code and fill out the questionnaire, the sample of respondents is not perfectly representative of all people using the beach.



The signage placed on the dog waste dispenser and inside door of the SaniKan to collect online questionnaires with a QR code. Photo credit: Amelia Kalagher

5. Results

The CCMRC conducted 23 on-foot surveys and received 31 questionnaire responses from the QR code. 5,400 dog waste bags were distributed via the CCMRC-procured dog waste station.

5.1. Data Summary

5,400 dog poop bags were distributed during this reporting period, compared to 3,400 in the previous reporting period. Dog waste bags were refilled once or twice a month, in quantities of 200-600 each time.

On-Foot Surveys

23 on-foot surveys were conducted in this reporting period (twice per month, with the final September survey not available at the time of this reporting). The number of cars present in the lot ranged from 2 to 35 and was highest in summer months. The number of dog poops observed on the levee (i.e. not picked up properly) ranged from 1 to 22, with an average of 8.1.



A surfer scouting the waves at Elwha Beach. 5 of 31 respondents to the digital questionnaire said they use this beach for surfing.

Digital Questionnaire

31 responses were received to the digital questionnaire during the reporting period. Similar to prior years, questionnaire results revealed mostly local usage, with 52% of respondents living in Clallam County and 78% having heard about the beach through word of mouth or as a local. There were an additional 25% of respondents who live outside Washington state, and 22% who heard about the beach online; while use is primarily local, tourists visit this beach as well. A total of 97% of respondents (all but one) rated the SaniKan and dog waste station as “critical”, “very important”, or “important”, showing a high level of community value placed on these resources.

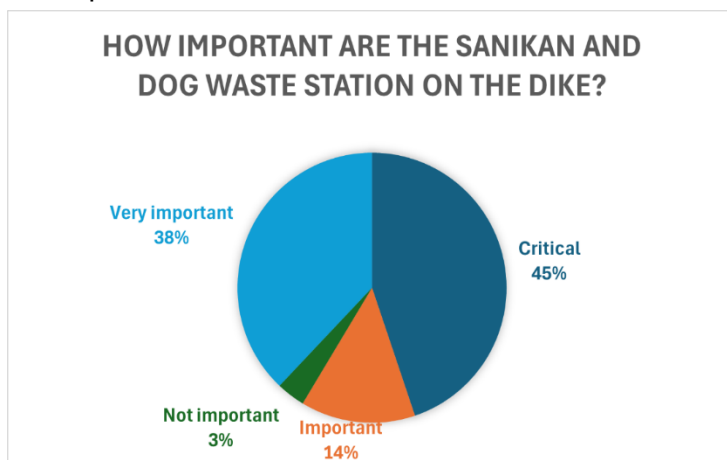


Figure 1. A pie chart depicting online survey responses to the question "How important are the Sanikan and dog waste facilities on the dike?". 97% of respondents rated the facilities as

"important" or higher. These results indicate a population of beachgoers that appreciate the facilities provided.

The raw data from questionnaires, additional questionnaire result pie charts, and data sheets for in-person surveys are available as appendices.

5.2. Outcomes

The goals for this project were achieved during this reporting period.

Goal 1: to protect and improve water quality and contribute to nearshore habitat and species protection:

- 5,400 dog waste bags distributed.
- Less dog poop observed on dike than previously (2018 vs this reporting period).
 - The dog poop surveys were initiated again in June 2023 and the counting was carried out via on-foot surveys in 2024-25. The numbers show that the overall number of unbagged poops has decreased since 2018.
 - The counts of unbagged poops are comparable to the previous grant year, showing that the facilities are continuing to be effective in facilitating behavior change for beachgoers.

Goal 2: to encourage community stewardship:

- Achieved through project lead's heavy involvement.
- 83% of survey respondents found the facilities critical or very important, showing care for using the area properly.
- 52% of survey respondents are from Clallam County, showing that this is an important recreational beach used by locals.
- Comments given on questionnaires indicated community appreciation of the beach and its responsible usage.



Leashed dogs on the trail (left), unleashed dog on the beach (right). Photo credit: Helle Andersen

5.3. Outputs

- SaniKan sponsored at the beach access for all 12 months of the reporting period
- 5,400 dog waste bags provided at trailhead
- 23 on-foot beach usage surveys conducted
- 31 digital questionnaires collected

5.4. Results in context

The dog poop surveys were initiated again in June 2023, and the counting was carried out for 23 on-foot surveys in 2024-2025. The numbers show that the overall number of poops has decreased since 2018 (Figure 2), and is comparable to the last reporting period (Figure 3). Other portions of the on-foot surveys were conducted differently than prior years, so comparability is limited.

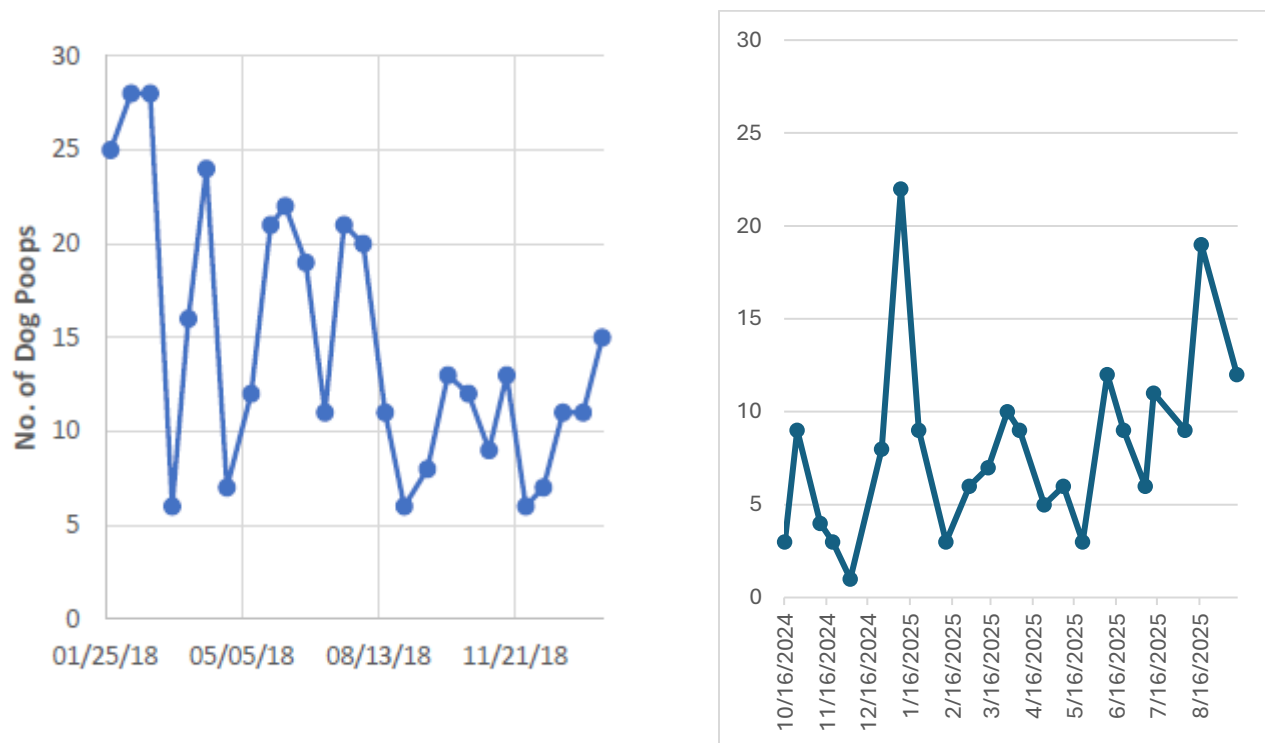


Figure 2. A comparison of unbagged dog poops observed on the dike trail during the project's first complete data collection in 2018 (left) and this period in 2024-2025 (right). Despite a couple surveys that were exceptions with higher numbers of unbagged poops, the overall counts of poops across this period are lower than these initial 2018 counts, showing the positive behavioral impact of the SaniKan and dog waste facilities over time.

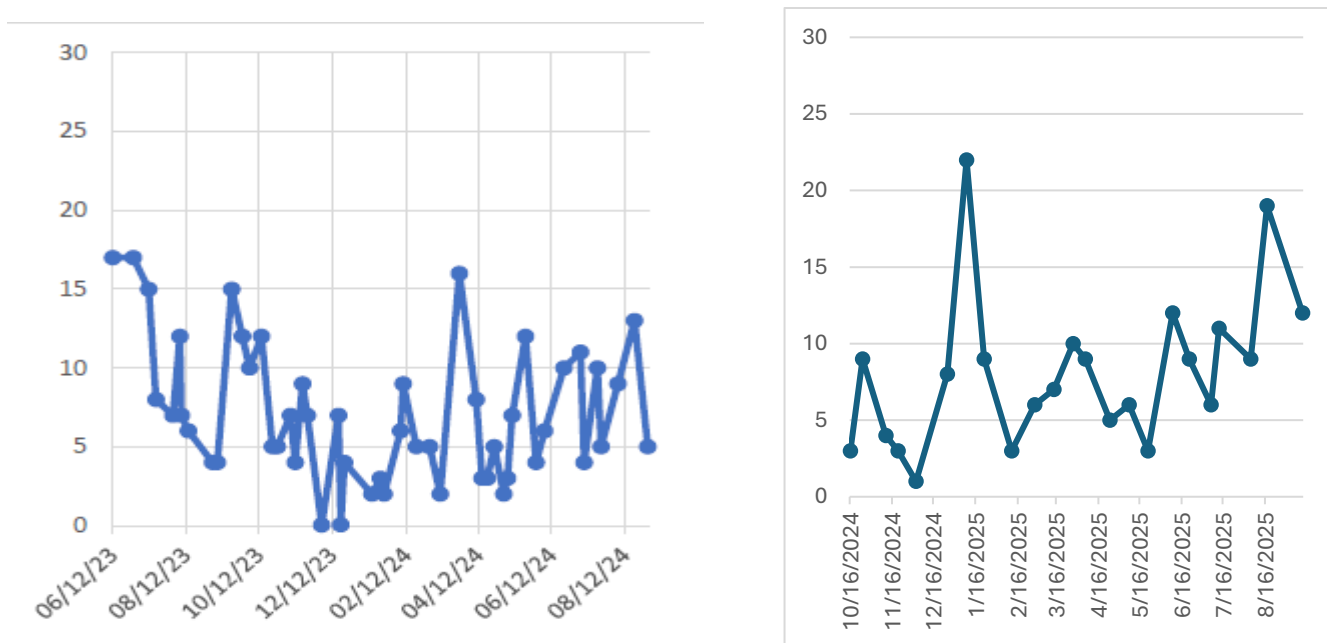


Figure 3. A comparison of unbagged dog poops observed on the dike trail in the previous grant period (left) and this period (right). The results indicate that the intervention is continuing to be effective, with comparable counts of unbagged poops observed across each period.

31 digital questionnaires were submitted during this grant period. A combined 75% of questionnaire respondents are from within Washington state, comparable to last year’s rate of 76%. 52% of total respondents are from within Clallam County specifically. There is a mix of local, regional and tourist visitors to this beach. A combined 78% of respondents heard about the area as a local (“always known”) or through word-of-mouth, compared to 92% for last year. This year’s questionnaires were entirely digital, and respondents self-selected by scanning a QR code, so comparability to prior years that included some walk-up questionnaires is limited.

6. Project Highlights, Innovations & Stories

Questionnaire comments offered some insight into how the Elwha Beach trail and the facilities provided made a positive impact on the community’s use of the area. Some highlighted comments:

- “We are part of the Place Road neighborhood. Visitors need to realize the dike is private property and visitors need to respect this valuable resource. Dogs must be on leashes, trash needs to be picked up and no fires!!!”

- “We enjoyed playing in the sand and skipping rocks. We appreciated the bathroom!”
- “Beautiful area, great for grandkids”
- “There is so much amazing diverse wildlife here! A very vital habitat for our area”
- “The area stays pretty clean because of these amenities; additional reminders to clean up waste, keep dogs on leash or voice control, respect neighboring properties (don’t walk up land from beach) would be helpful”
- “There are still people not picking up dog poop on the beach. Such a bummer”
- “I have always felt like a guest having the privilege to use this area, so have treated it at such.”



A group of volunteers at a 2023 Elwha beach cleanup during Orca Week. Photo credit: Helle Andersen

Elwha Beach as Outdoor Classroom

Many educators in the area have continued to use the beach and estuary as an outdoor classroom where the students study the river and beach processes, flora and fauna while talking about restoration efforts in the area.

7. Lessons Learned

A main takeaway is that people will use the sanitary facilities, and numbers of visible dog poops left on the access dike have decreased which means less fecal waste pollution.

8. Next Steps

The CCMRC received a grant from the North Olympic Development Council, covering the costs for the SaniKan, dog waste station service and doggie waste bags from October 2025 – September 2027. This will allow the ecosystem and community to continue benefiting from these resources. The digital questionnaire, linked with a QR code on signage, will continue to provide some data on beach visitors and their use of the SaniKan. The CCMRC will use this data to make informed stewardship decisions going forward. The CCMRC will also continue to reach out to find a community partner that can carry on with the Elwha Beach Stewardship.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire Data

The following data was collected from questionnaires in this reporting period, both in-person and online. Questions and answers are abbreviated in this table for ease of viewing, and the key is available below the table. Blank cells represent questions not answered in that questionnaire.

Date	Visit freq.	Activities	Import.	Access Owner	How You Heard	Where You Live	# People	# Dogs	Transport
10/5/2024	2	W,B	5	T/P	AK	CC	2	0	V
2/1/2025	5	W,D,S	5	P	WOM	CC	1	1	W
2/1/2025	5	W,D	5	T/P	AK	CC	2	1	W
3/21/2025	2	W,D	4	C	WOM	CC	1	1	V
4/27/2025	1	W,B	1	P	O	WA	1	0	V
6/9/2025	1	S	4	T/P	WOM	WA	2	0	V
7/12/2025	2	W,B	4	C	WOM	CC	2	0	V
7/19/2025	2	D	5	T/P	O	CC	2	2	V
8/3/2025	2	W,D,B	3	P	WOM	CC	2	1	V
8/3/2025	2	W,D,B	3	P	WOM	CC	2	1	V
8/8/2025	1	W,D	4	T	O	WA	6	1	V
8/14/2025	1	W,D,B	3	T/P	WOM	OOS	3	0	V
8/14/2025	2	W,B	5	P	WOM	OOS	5	0	V
8/16/2025	1	W	4	P	O	OOS	2	0	V
8/16/2025	1	W	4	T/P		OOS	2	0	V
8/16/2025	2	W,S,B	5	C	AK	WA	2	0	V
8/18/2025	5	D	5	P	WOM	CC	2	3	V
8/18/2025	4	W,P,B	5	P	AK	CC	4	0	V

8/19/2025	1	W,B	5	T/P		OOS	30	0	V
8/20/2025	1	W,D,P	5	S	AK	OC	4	1	V
8/23/2025	1	W,P,B	3	P	WOM	WA	2	0	V
9/2/2025	2	W,P,B	4	S	WOM	WA	3	0	V
9/7/2025	2	W,D	4	T/P	AK	CC	2	1	V
9/8/2025	1	B				OOS	2	0	V
9/8/2025	1	B				OOS	2	0	V
9/10/2025	1	D	4	C	O	CC	2	1	V
9/11/2025	1	W,D	4	T/P	O	CC	3	1	V
9/12/2025	2	W,S	5	C	WOM	WA	2	0	V
9/16/2025	2	W,D,P,B	5	T/P	WOM	CC	2	1	V
9/19/2025	2	W,P	4	T	WOM	CC	1	0	V
9/23/2025	4	S	5	C	WOM	CC	3	1	V

Questionnaire Key:

- Visit Freq: “How often do you come to the Elwha Estuary?”
 - 1 = first time
 - 2 = a few times a year
 - 3 = often, in the summer (no respondents chose this option)
 - 4 = every month
 - 5 = every week
- Activities: “What do you usually do at the estuary?” – *many respondents checked multiple activities, listed with commas*
 - W = Walk
 - D = Walk the dog
 - S = Surf
 - B = Birding
 - P = Picnic
- Import.: “How important are the Sanikan and dog waste disposal station on the dike?”
 - 5 = Critical
 - 4 = Very important
 - 3 = Important
 - 2 = Somewhat important
 - 1 = Not important
- Access Owner: “Who do you think owns the access to the estuary?” – *some respondents checked multiple options, listed with commas*
 - S = State
 - C = County
 - T = Tribe
 - T/P = Tribe/Private
 - P = Private
- How You Heard: “How did you hear about the Elwha Estuary?”
 - WOM = Word of mouth
 - AK = Always known (local)

- O = Online
- TA = Travel Agency (no respondents chose this option)
- Where You Live: “Where do you live?”
 - CC = Clallam Co.
 - WA = Washington
 - OOS = Out-of-state
 - OC = Other country
- # People: “How many people are in your party? Please include yourself.”
- # Dogs: “How many dogs are with you?”
- Transport: “Did you arrive by vehicle, or on foot?”
 - V = Vehicle
 - W = Walked

Appendix 2: Questionnaire Results Figures

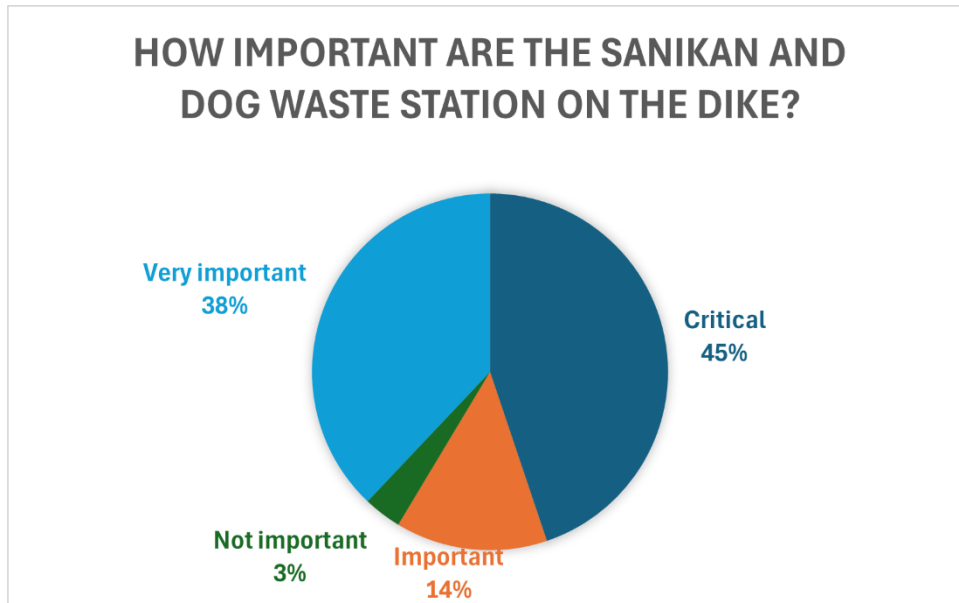


Figure 4. A pie chart depicting online survey responses to the question "How important are the Sanikan and dog waste facilities on the dike?". 97% of respondents rated the facilities as "important" or higher. These results indicate that respondents appreciate the facilities provided.

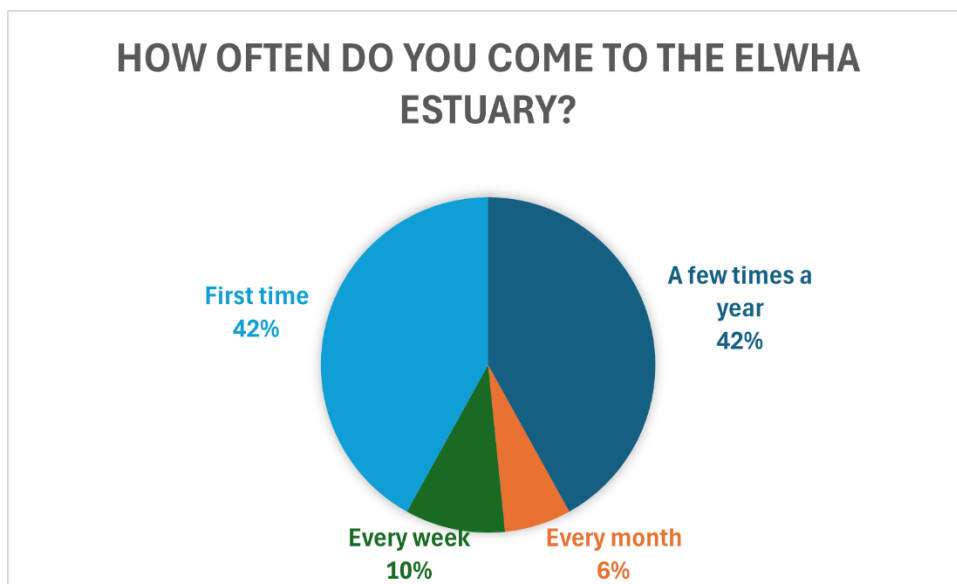


Figure 5. A pie chart depicting online survey responses to the question "How often do you come to the Elwha estuary?". 42% are first-time visitors, and a combined 16% are frequent users once a month or more. Note that the QR code questionnaire is self-selected, so respondents who visit frequently would not likely fill it out more than once.

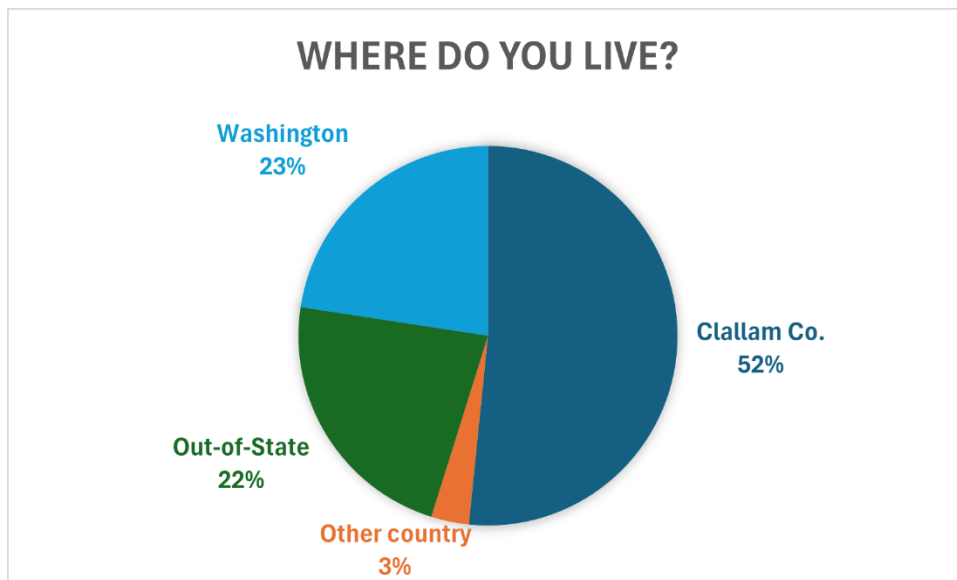


Figure 6. A pie chart depicting online survey responses to the question "Where do you live?". A combined 75% of respondents are from within Washington state, comparable to last year's rate of 76%. There is a mix of local, regional and tourist visitors to this beach.

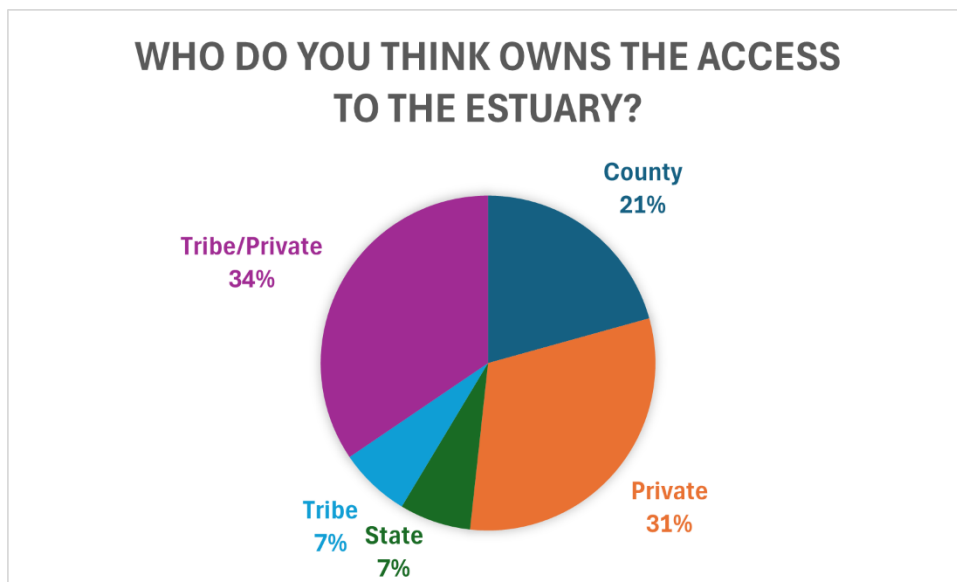


Figure 7. A pie chart depicting online survey responses to the question "Who do you think owns the access to the estuary?". The correct answer is Tribe/Private, as the area is a mix of both for different parts of the beach.

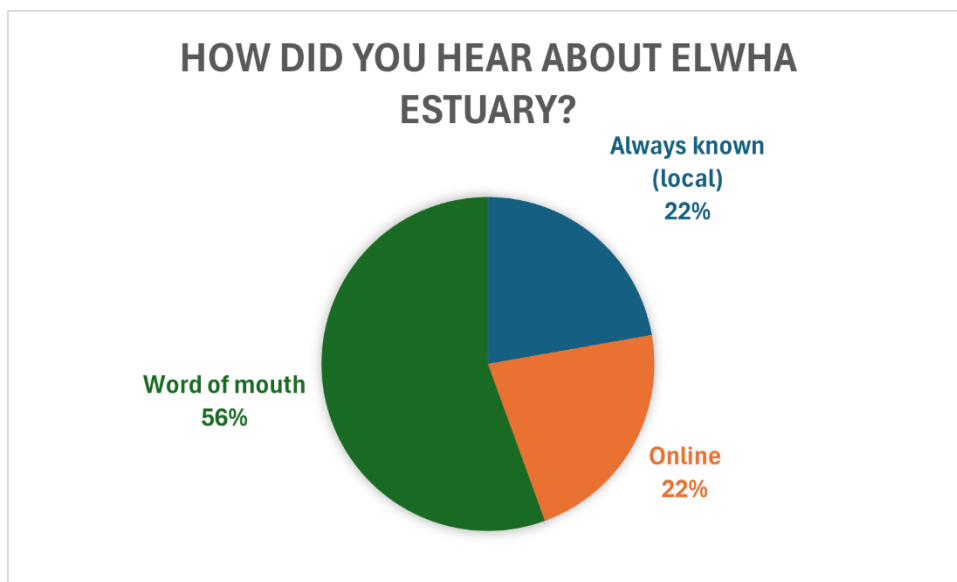


Figure 8. A pie chart depicting online survey responses to the question "How did you hear about the Elwha Estuary?". A combined 78% of respondents heard about the area as a local or through word-of-mouth, compared to 92% for last year.

Appendix 3: In-Person Survey Data Sheets

Elwha Beach Stewardship Data Sheet

2024

Date	Weather	Wind (Knts)	Time	Temp. (F)	Total Cars	O-O-S Cars	Dog Poops	Dog Poop on Dike	Dog Poop on Beach	No. Bags Replaced
9/17*	—	—	9 Am	—	8	—	—	—	—	—
9/22	CLOUDY	0-2	10:55 Am	58	15	0	9	HHH IIII	0	200
10/16	SUNNY	5-8	9:30 Am	—	8	3	3	III	0	400
10/25	CLOUDY w/ SUN BEAMS	0-2	3:15 Pm	51	7	0	9	HHH IIII	0	200
11/11	CLOUDY/RAIN	—	3 Pm	—	12	3	4	III	1	200
11/20	SUNNY w/ CLOUDS	0-2	1:15 Pm	45	3	0	3	III	0	0
12/3	SUNNY	0-5	12:55 Pm	46	8	1	1	I	0	0
12/26	SUNNY w/ CLOUDS	5-10	2:45 Pm	—	15	2	8	HHH IIII	0	400

* TIM DID THIS SURVEY WHEN HE DID FF SAMPLING

2025

Elwha Beach Stewardship Data Sheet

Date	Weather	Wind (Knts)	Time	Temp. (F)	Total Cars	O-O-S Cars	Dog Poops	Dog Poop on Dike	Dog Poop on Beach	No. Bags Replaced
1/9	CLOUDY	0-2	12:11 PM	46	5	1	22	### ### ### ### 11	0	0
1/22	HAZY SUN	0-2	2:00 PM	43	5	0	9	### 1111	0	0
2/11	SUNNY	5	1:00 PM	35	5	0	3	111	0	400
2/28	SUNNY w/ CLOUDS	2-5	9:30 AM	43	7	0	6	### 1 1 BAGGED	0	0
3/14	SUNNY w/ CLOUDS	5-10	2:50 PM	49	9	0	7	### 11	0	400
3/28	CLOUDY	0-2	9:05 AM	46	3	0	10	### ###	0	200
4/6	LIGHT RAIN	0-2	12:13 PM	50	6	1	9	### 1111	0	0
4/24	SUNNY w/ CLOUDS	0-2	2:50 PM	63	10	0	5	###	0	400
5/8	SUNNY	2-5	12:40 PM	55	19	0	6	### 1 2 BAGGED	0	0
5/22	SUNNY	2-5	8:40 AM	50	2	1	3	111	0	400
6/9	SUNNY	0-2	10:12 AM	62	19	1	12	### ### 11	0	400

2025-

Elwha Beach Stewardship Data Sheet

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