

‘Overtaken by plant life.’ Offut Lake residents want to tax themselves to battle algae, weeds

BY MARTÍN BILBAO

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Some Offut Lake property owners want to form a new lake management district to reduce toxic algae blooms and limit weed growth. The Thurston County Board of Commissioners reviewed the petition during a Wednesday meeting, about two months after residents submitted the petition. The lake is south of Waldrick Road and east of Old Highway 99 and Millersylvania State Park.

If formed as proposed, affected property owners would be taxed to “protect the water quality, fish and wildlife, recreation and aesthetic values” of the lake for a 10-year period starting in 2023. The petition follows a similar proposal by Pattison Lake residents. The petition indicates Offut Lake has been contending with toxic algae blooms, rapidly increasing weed growth and pollution, which is disrupting the ecological balance of the lake and hindered boating and swimming activities.

A group of residents called “Offut Lake Community” have created a website detailing their case for the LMD. The website describes a lake being overtaken by plant life. “The amount of uncontrolled growth of aquatic vegetation in Offut Lake has created an environment where it is increasingly difficult, and in some cases, impossible for residents and visitors to enjoy the benefits usually enjoyed by lake residents,” the website says. Dozens of Pattison Lake residents

Water Resource Manager Tim Wilson said the process to form the Pattison LMD is about 2-3 months ahead of the Offut Lake process. If all goes smoothly, he estimated the Offut LMD could be formed by late winter or early spring. In both cases, Thurston County Public Works would administer the districts with input from an advisory committee of LMD ratepayers. An additional full-time county employee would be needed to oversee both districts, Wilson said. The Offut petitioners estimate their annual rates and charges will raise about \$82,991 in 2023. Parcel rates would vary depending on their proximity to the lake and whether they are developed or not.

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A map of the proposed boundaries for a new lake management district at Offut Lake. Local residents submitted a petition for the LMD to Thurston County in June 2022. Courtesy of Thurston County

For example, the petition indicates owners of developed lakefront parcels would pay \$750 while owners of undeveloped lakefront parcels would pay \$375. Upland parcels would be charged \$70 and habitat reserve parcels would be charged \$94.

The petitioners also propose Washington state Fish and Wildlife pay \$16,200 because it owns a boat launch on the lake. Lastly, Offut Lake Resort would pay \$1,500. These funds should cover the cost of district activities, Wilson said. Among these activities, the petition calls for a study to assess lake water quality and identify aquatic vegetation. After the study, the petition says water quality tests would begin. Weed and algae treatments would then follow by the third and sixth year respectively. Given recent interest in LMDs, Wilson said staff are working on proposing an overarching, holistic study of county lakes. He said this should help the county develop its approach to improving and protecting lakes. "It's a balancing act," Wilson said. "And reactive management could cause problems." County Commissioner Tye Menser said he appreciated that approach because he's wary of over-managing nature. "If I've got to err on the side of one or the other, I'm going to take my chances with a more natural process than with a reactionary engineered process, chasing that tail." County Manager Ramiro Chavez said the board will soon consider approving a resolution indicating the county intends to pursue establishing the Offut LMD. A public hearing would then be conducted, and the board would eventually determine whether the LMD would be in the public interest and authorize a vote of the affected landowners.