

“This place is sacred to us.” Offut Lake landowners want higher taxes to fix water quality.

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Offut Lake Resort would pay \$1,500 if an Offut Lake Management District is formed. STEVE BLOOM sbloom@theolympian.com

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Over a dozen Offut Lake property owners told the Thurston County Board of Commissioners last week that they want to be taxed to help reduce toxic algae blooms and weed growth. The landowners spoke in support of their petition to form an Offut Lake Management District during a Board of Commissioner meeting.

Offut Lake spans more than 190 acres south of Waldrick Road and east of Millersylvania State Park. The petition and many commenters described a lake overtaken by plant life that has hindered boating and swimming activities. Diane Perlman said her property on the north side of the lake has been in her family for over 100 years. She grew up swimming in the lake and said she has many memories tied to it.

“This is about so much more than saving the lake,” Perlman said. “It’s about hundreds of precious family memories and dreams of what we want to do with the next generation.” Sally Anderson, who has had a property on the south side of the lake for 40 years, said she can no

longer swim in the lake every day like she used to. "At this point when we spend time at our home, I do not swim that lake," Anderson said. "I rake weeds. I will not swim it. You cannot walk out far enough to get in the water from the south side."

Rob Pogue, who represented Offut Lake Resort, said the lake is part of his family's livelihood. He called on the board to allow affected property owners to vote on whether to approve the lake management district "This place is sacred to us, and we mean it," Pogue said. "Let us put this forward, let us put it out to the rest of our community and let us get to work on solving these issues that have been neglected for far too long." The board reviewed their petition in August and directed county staff to draft a resolution declaring their intent to pursue establishing the Offut Lake Management District. County Manager Ramiro Chavez said the board may consider that resolution as soon as mid-September.

After approving the resolution, a public hearing would be held. Following that, the board would determine whether the LMD would be in the public interest and authorize the vote of affected landowners. If formed as proposed, affected property owners would help pay to improve the lake for 10 years starting in 2023. The petition is similar to a proposal by Pattison Lake residents. The Offut Lake 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. 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. Robert Wicklund, who lives on Isom Road, said the new charges would be worth it if it means supporting a coordinated, thoughtful approach to improving the lake. "It pains me to say that I'm even in favor of asking you to increase my taxes in order to get the assistance we need to clean out the lake," Wicklund said. "It doesn't seem right that we should have to do this, but if that's what it takes, I'm all in."