

City of Seattle Lake Union Seaplane Landing Buoys Project Summary – 2/17/16



Background: Lake Union is used for a variety of activities including recreational and commercial boating, hand-powered watercraft (such as canoes and kayaks), and seaplane takeoffs and landings. Kenmore Air and Seattle Seaplanes are two private seaplane companies located on the southern portion of Lake Union. They appear to be the primary businesses using the lake for seaplane activities. The FAA does not appear to have information about the average number of daily seaplane takeoffs and landings, but the project JARPA cites a Seattle Times article from 2013 which indicates Kenmore Air performs up to 40 takeoffs per day. A more recent [Komo News article](#) states seaplanes perform up to 50

takeoffs and 50 landings on Lake Union on a busy day. The FAA notes increased boating activity between April 15 and October 15 each year ([source](#) – see Remarks).

Proposed project: Kenmore Air and the Seattle Department of Planning and Development jointly propose to install eight lighted buoys for seaplanes landing in the southern portion of Lake Union. The project is proposed as a means of increasing safety for seaplanes and vessels using the lake. The proposal indicates seaplane pilots will activate the buoy lights prior to takeoff or landing, which will alert vessels to clear the landing zone. During initial meetings, project proponents indicated the buoys may be removed during the colder months when there is less activity on the lake, but the helical anchors will remain in place year-round.

Current status: DNR is considering granting a one-year “trial period” Right of Entry for the installation of the buoys. The proposed Right of Entry does not authorize the waters comprising the landing strip itself. When the Right of Entry expires a year after commencement, DNR staff will work with the City of Seattle to consider whether to continue this project and issue a longer authorization for the buoys. As of 2/16/2016 the City of Seattle has received a Shoreline Exemption, a CZMA consistency determination,

and an HPA. The City of Seattle has also determined the proposal is exempt from SEPA. The City of Seattle has not yet received a 404 authorization from the Army Corps of Engineers or support from the Muckleshoot Tribe. DNR is speaking with the Coast Guard and the City of Seattle to determine exactly how tall the buoys will be and whether it is feasible to use smaller buoys to accommodate sailboat navigation.

Public comments: DNR has received public comments from several members of the public on this project, some of whom state they represent Seattle-based boating groups. Most of the commenters share the same key concerns, which are:

- They feel the public outreach, Army Corps of Engineers, and SEPA processes were insufficient and failed to include many people who use the lake both recreationally and commercially.
- They feel the buoys will interfere with navigation on the lake for both recreation and commercial uses.
 - Mr. Matthew Upton contacted DNR on behalf of US Seafoods, which operates a waterfront commercial facility on the east side of Lake Union. US Seafoods operates vessels up to 350 feet and is concerned they will be unable to maneuver around the buoys.
 - Recreational sailboat users have indicated sailboat masts are generally not high enough off the water to clear the buoys (estimated 5 feet tall). They feel the sailboats may not be able to move out of the landing zone when the lights are activate if wind conditions are not sufficient to move the boats. They feel the buoys will be obstacles during normal sailing as sailboats tack at 45 degrees. Finally, they feel the buoys will be obstacles during the regular boat races, such as Duck Dodge and Goosebumps events.
- They feel the buoys set a precedent of giving preferential use of a public space to Kenmore Air, a commercial operation.
- They feel the flashing lights will give seaplane pilots a false sense of security. They feel the buoys will shift the onus of safety from Kenmore Air to all other users of the lake, many of whom may not be aware of what the warning lights mean.
- They feel the buoys will be unsightly, especially if they are required to be lit 24 hours a day for navigational safety.

Laurel Kanawyer is available to answer questions or provide additional information about this proposal. She can be reached at 253-441-0904 or Laurel.Kanawyer@dnr.wa.gov.