

Lummi Nation moves forward with plans for marina at Gooseberry Point

By Ralph Schwartz

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EVAN ABELL — The Bellingham Herald

LUMMI RESERVATION — A marina for Lummi Nation fishermen at Gooseberry Point is still years away, but Whatcom County officials this year will begin working on a plan to accommodate the marina by altering the Lummi ferry dock.

The county will not be required to relocate the dock, but it likely will need to be realigned, as outlined in [the lease](#) that allows the county to use Gooseberry Point as a ferry landing. The tribe's preferred marina design includes a floating breakwater directly in front of the dock.

“The county has an obligation to realign the approach of the ferry at our cost, but other aspects of the lease remain in force,” county Executive Jack Louws said in an email on Wednesday, Feb. 11, to The Bellingham Herald. “We will strive to do this with a minimum disruption in schedule.”

The 20-car ferry runs 365 days a year, serving visitors to Lummi Island and the island's 900 residents.

The lease obligates the county to start planning a redesign of the dock when the Lummis apply to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build the marina. The tribe anticipates submitting that application in June, according to a [Jan. 26 letter](#) from Lummi Chairman Tim Ballew to Louws.

In an interview, Ballew emphasized that marina planning is in the earliest stages. The Lummi Indian Business Council, with input from tribal members, must approve a marina plan before submitting the application to the Corps, he said.

"We're focusing on what would be the appropriate design for safe harbor and preserving the environment," Ballew said.

Lummi planners opted for a breakwater over dredging to minimize the impact to eel grass beds, the letter said.

The first phase of marina construction includes 100 slips, with expansion to 200 spaces for boats in a later phase. The marina primarily would be for tribal fishermen, Ballew said. Demand for dock space is high for the Lummis' 400-boat fishing fleet, the chairman said.

The federal permit for a marina in [Fisherman's Cove](#), just east of Gooseberry Point, is expected in early 2017. The tribe will spend two or three years after that seeking funds for marina construction, the Jan. 26 letter said.

County and tribal officials three years ago concluded contentious negotiations over the current 35-year lease for the ferry dock. In addition to a \$200,000-per-year lease payment, the county is paying the tribe \$6 million in three installments for road improvements near the landing.

The expensive lease relative to the value of the property is meant to pay for the impact of increased traffic on the reservation and the ferry's disruption of tribal fishing grounds, council member Sam Crawford said on the day in 2011 when the council approved the lease.

Ballew said his letter to Louws is part of the Lummis' effort to keep the line of communication with the county open as the tribe moves forward with marina planning.

"We're a part of a growing community and want to contribute to improved communication between us and the county," Ballew said. "They need to plan just like we do."

Louws said he expects county officials to keep Lummi Island residents informed about development of the marina through the [Lummi Island Ferry Advisory Committee](#).

"This process is just starting, and I am committed to updating the council and community regularly," Louws said.

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