

# WCA Organic Waste Topic Comments

David W Haskell - January 15, 2026

## Climate Change Mitigation through Organic Waste Reform

Island County stands at a pivotal moment in its approach to solid waste management. The current “One-Bin” system, which sends all mixed waste 400 miles to a regional landfill, is financially unsustainable, environmentally harmful, and incompatible with new Washington state law. Most critically, it undermines the county’s ability to address climate change—a challenge that demands urgent, systemic action.

## Climate Imperative and Legislative Mandate

Washington’s House Bill 1799 requires a 75% reduction in landfilled organic material by 2030, compelling Island County to transition from waste disposal to resource recovery. Organic waste, comprising 40–50% of the county’s stream, is a major source of methane—a greenhouse gas up to 86 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> over 20 years. The current system’s long-haul transport and landfill practices generate substantial greenhouse gas emissions, directly conflicting with the county’s climate resilience goals.

## Transforming Waste into Climate Action

A 2024 whitepaper by Whidbey Climate Action proposes a shift from “Waste Management” to “Resource Management,” prioritizing the diversion of organics into a decentralized, on-island composting system. This strategy is designed to maximize climate benefits by:

**Reducing Greenhouse Gases:** Diverting organics from landfill eliminates methane emissions and cuts carbon output from transportation.

**Building Soil Health:** Locally produced compost enhances agricultural resilience, supporting carbon sequestration and ecosystem vitality.

**Supporting Economic and Community Wellbeing:** A local composting industry creates jobs and strengthens the food system, aligning with climate adaptation and mitigation goals.

## Strategic Roadmap for Climate-Driven Transition

The recommended approach is a two-phase roadmap:

**Investigation and Scoping:** Gather data on current system costs, compost market dynamics, and available organic resources.

**Identification of Solutions:** Evaluate decentralized composting technologies and programs, drawing on successful models from similar communities.

## Policy Alignment and Community Engagement

This transition directly supports the Draft 2025 Climate Element of the Island County Comprehensive Plan, including goals to protect water resources, foster resilient agriculture, and establish sustainable land use. It also mirrors regional strategies for island communities facing waste and climate challenges. The county’s active update of its Solid Waste Management Plan provide the necessary operational framework for integrating climate mitigation into waste policy.

## Conclusion

Island County's waste system reform is not just a compliance issue—it is a climate action imperative. By prioritizing organic waste diversion and decentralized composting, the county can achieve substantial greenhouse gas reductions, support local agriculture, and fulfill its climate resilience commitments.

**RECOMMENDATION: The DRAFT Comprehensive Plan (specifically Element 11-Climate) be amended to make climate protection mitigation the guiding principle/policy mandate for all future Island County waste management decisions.**