



## Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish (WRIA 8) Watershed

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Seattle, WA 98104-3855

March 10, 2015

Karen Walter  
Watersheds and Land Use Team Leader  
Muckleshoot Indian Tribe Fisheries Division  
Habitat Program  
39015 172nd Ave SE  
Auburn, WA 98092

Dear Ms. Walter:

I am writing at King County's request in response to a portion of your comments submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) regarding King County's proposed mitigation project in the Elliott Bridge Reach of the Cedar River (EBR project). As you know, the proposed EBR project is mitigating a portion of the unavoidable impacts to wetlands and aquatic areas associated with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) State Route 520 Replacement project.

Comments on the Corps' Nationwide 27 Permit application [NWS-2014-1024] indicated that the EBR project site was previously identified as a restoration project in the *WRIA 8 Chinook Salmon Conservation Plan* (WRIA 8 Plan), and the comments requested "a firm commitment that [King County] will seek formal approval by the WRIA 8 Forum that mitigation-funded projects do not count towards recovery goals in this watershed and that this particular project [be] removed from the recovery plan list and a new project [be] identified in its place."

We understand and are in agreement with the fundamental idea that mitigation should not be counted as restoration for the purposes of Chinook salmon recovery. To this end, WRIA 8 staff will present this item to the WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council at an upcoming meeting and will seek their input and guidance on the appropriate way to address this policy issue in the update to the WRIA 8 Plan, which is intended to commence later in 2015. In the meantime, we will exclude the ERB project from any habitat restoration metric reporting.

It is important to clarify that the WRIA 8 Plan does not contain quantitative habitat restoration goals; progress toward Chinook recovery is measured using Chinook salmon Viable Salmonid Population goals rather than habitat metrics. Nevertheless, we track implementation of habitat protection and restoration activities and report these metrics to our partners, and we agree that mitigation should not be considered as a net increase in salmon habitat protection and restoration.

Karen Walter  
March 10, 2015  
Page 2 of 2

Regarding the removal of the ERB project from the WRIA 8 Plan and identifying a replacement, we understand the premise behind this comment. However, the only defined project in the WRIA 8 Plan relating to the Elliot Bridge area (project C216 from Volume II, Chapter 10) is focused on property acquisition. The Plan states a comprehensive restoration effort in this area would provide the greatest salmon benefit, yet no restoration project is present in the project list.

In 2009, WRIA 8 updated project C216 to include an expanded acquisition area (C216B) and added the project to the WRIA 8 Three-Year Work Plan, with the intent of the acquisitions being to facilitate future floodplain reconnection. While the purpose of the acquisitions is clearly focused on future restoration of the site, a specific restoration project for the Elliot Bridge reach was not created by the 2009 update and to date has not been established by WRIA 8. For this reason, the current EBR project under permitting consideration is not part of tracking restoration progress in WRIA 8.

I hope the information provided here sufficiently addresses your comments so that the Corps may issue the NWP 27 permit for the EBR project to enable King County to proceed with construction this summer. Although it is mitigation, this project should ultimately improve Chinook salmon habitat along the mainstem Cedar River.

Thank you for being a strong supporter of Chinook salmon recovery in WRIA 8. I appreciate your ongoing review of mitigation projects to ensure that mitigation is being done in a strategic and effective way. If you would like the opportunity to contribute to or review the information we deliver to the WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council, please let me know. Likewise, if you have any questions or want to discuss this matter further, please don't hesitate to contact me at [jason.mulvihill-kuntz@kingcounty.gov](mailto:jason.mulvihill-kuntz@kingcounty.gov) or (206) 477-4780.

Sincerely,



Jason Mulvihill-Kuntz

Watershed Coordinator, Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish Watershed (WRIA 8)