

WATER RESOURCE INVENTORY AREA (WRIA 8) SALMON RECOVERY COUNCIL



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Cedar River Council
Friends of the Cedar River Watershed
Friends of the Issaquah Salmon Hatchery
Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce
Long Live the Kings
Mid-Sound Fisheries Enhancement Group
Mountains to Sound Greenway
Northwest Marine Trade Association
Sno-King Watershed Council
Trout Unlimited
Water Tenders

Alderwood Water and Wastewater District
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
US Army Corps of Engineers
Washington Departments:
Ecology
Fish and Wildlife
Natural Resources
Washington Association of Sewer and Water Districts
King Conservation District

September XX, 2015

Colonel John Buck
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
PO Box 3755
Seattle, WA 98124-3755



Dear Colonel Buck:

On behalf of the Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish Watershed (WRIA 8) Salmon Recovery Council (Council), I would like to thank the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for continued participation in the WRIA 8 effort to recover Chinook salmon listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Council is a partnership of 28 local governments, citizens, community groups, state and federal agencies, and businesses working together to implement the *WRIA 8 Chinook Salmon Conservation Plan*. The Corps is an essential partner in our effort, especially in maintaining safe passage for salmon at the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks (Locks), restoring habitat, and promoting water quality allowing salmon to return to spawn in our local rivers and streams.

This year's hot and dry summer has created unprecedented water management challenges and extremely stressful conditions for salmon. Low lake and stream levels and high water temperatures can increase the rate of disease, can pose a thermal barrier to adult salmon migrating back to their spawning grounds, and can even be lethal. For the week of August 3, Lake Washington water levels were the second lowest ever recorded based on Corps records going back to 1940. Temperatures for the week at the Locks were the highest since record-keeping began in 2004—above the 21°C threshold that poses a thermal barrier to salmon migration and can result in direct mortality. Climate experts indicate increased summer temperatures and lower flows are likely to continue in the future.

The Corps' operations and maintenance of the Lake Washington Ship Canal (Ship Canal) and Locks is critical to fish passage and influences water quality conditions in the surrounding waters. The National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (together known as the "Services") and the Services' Biological Opinions for the operation and maintenance of the Locks and Ship Canal note a general trend of increasing temperatures over time. This summer's weather has made temperature an even greater concern.

The Lake Washington Ship Canal Water Quality Science Panel—convened by the Corps in 2010 in response to the Biological Opinion—developed recommendations for specific actions to address water quality issues at the Locks, including low dissolved oxygen, salt water mixing, and high water temperatures. The Panel's 2012 final report ranks recommended actions according to hypothesized benefit and feasibility, and the Council commends the Corps for taking steps to study and evaluate the feasibility of the Panel's recommendations.

In particular, we appreciate the Corps investigating the benefits of false lockings in 2013 and 2014 to study the effects of this action on water temperatures (consistent with recommendation R-1). The study indicated some benefit to salmon by replenishing cool water in the Ship Canal. The study also determined the concentrations of salt water moving upstream of the Locks as a result of various facility operations, and confirmed operation of the saltwater drain and barrier is important to prevent detrimental quantities of salt water from entering Lake Union.

In addition to performing false lockings, we are pleased to know funding has been secured to complete design for replacing the Stoney Gates filling culvert valve and machinery, which supports implementation of the Panel's second recommendation (R-2) to improve hydraulic control systems and physical components of the Lock fill system. Once constructed, these infrastructure improvements are anticipated to significantly improve the migration and survival of juvenile and adult salmon through the Locks.

The Council appreciates the Corps' recent efforts to study and evaluate the feasibility of the Panel's recommendations, and we strongly urge the Corps to pursue additional funding for constructing the remaining identified critical improvements at the Locks and to take additional actions to more clearly define water quality issues, particularly temperature, in the Ship Canal and develop effective strategies to address them. We understand the Corps and Services will reinitiate consultation on the operation of the Locks and Ship Canal soon, which presents an ideal opportunity to refine appropriate actions and focus on further addressing these issues. We look forward to continuing to partner with the Corps to advance urgent water quality and infrastructure improvements that have been identified to ensure effective fish passage and safe operation of the Locks.

If you have any questions about WRIA 8 salmon recovery priorities, please contact Jason Mulvihill-Kuntz, the Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish Watershed Coordinator at 206-477-4780 or jason.mulvihill-kuntz@kingcounty.gov. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Larry Phillips
Chair, WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council
Chair, Metropolitan King County Council

Cc: Will Stelle, Regional Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Eric Rickerson, State Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Louie Ungaro, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
Nate McGowan, Hiram M. Chittenden Locks Operations Project Manager
Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish Watershed (WRIA 8) Salmon Recovery Council members