

September 11, 2002

Mr. Mark Tompkins, Environmental Health Manager
Mr. Ted Wixom, Chair SJCWRMC
San Juan County Health and Community Services
P.O. Box 607
145 Rhone
Friday Harbor, WA 98250

Re: San Juan Islands (Orcas Island) - Instream flows for Cascade Creek

Dear Mr. Tompkins and Mr. Wixom:

Thank you for your letter of September 9 expressing your concerns about my e-mail recommendations to Dr. Sakrison. My recommendations were (1) that detailed instream flow studies should not be done on Cascade Creek nor for other San Juan County streams, and (2) that Cascade Creek should be closed to further appropriation. We had conducted reconnaissance level studies on those streams, as discussed in the e-mail.

As background, I have over 20 years of conducting instream flow studies throughout Washington, over 30 years as a stream ecologist, and over 30 years familiarity with the San Juan islands (as a landowner) and their streams. My duties at the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) include responding to Dr. Sakrison when he asks for an opinion about instream flow needs and studies. WDFW has a dual role to provide recommendations to Ecology and assistance, when requested, to watershed planning units. I have responsibility for review of water right applications under RCW 77.55.050 and making recommendations on behalf of WDFW to Department of Ecology on whether a water right should be issued; my review has included many applications throughout the San Juan Islands, and in doing so I have visited the proposed sites of diversion for many of those applications. Recently I co-authored a book on instream flows, which included review of instream flow methods.

My reason for my recommendations is that detailed studies are expensive and on streams of this type (channel width, slope) they will give you the same answer (i.e., there is no water surplus to fish needs) as the reconnaissance level studies. When we visited Cascade Creek to measure it we talked to a landowner who told us about salmon use. The photographs we received were recognizable by location. The photographs confirmed the species (coho and chum salmon). The reach of Cascade Creek that is accessible to salmon is very short, less than half a mile. A waterfall blocks passage above that point and it would not be practical to provide passage above

the waterfall. I have no reason to believe that the fish were hand carried above the waterfall, and there is no reason that a small population of salmon could not perpetuate itself in the lower end of Cascade Creek.

In my response to Dr. Sakrison, I felt it would be more informative to indicate how WDFW would respond to a water right application on Cascade Creek, rather than keep such information to myself. WDFW response would be based on agency policy that small streams have no water surplus to fish needs. Ultimately, any watershed management plan developed by the planning unit must be compatible with state agency duties. Where a potential for conflict exists, it is better to point that out early rather than late. Problem identification is a key first point in planning a satisfactory solution to address the problem in a successful plan.

I also addressed several other streams in the county. There is still uncertainty in my mind about fish use in the two False Bay tributaries and the Wescott Bay tributary. A former WDFW biologist reliably reported cutthroat use in the Wescott Bay tributary and the old WDF salmon catalog suggests salmon use in the False Bay tributaries. The Friday Harbor tributary on UW lab property appears NOT to be a salmon stream despite net pen culture near the mouth. I know there are efforts to (re?-)establish cutthroat use in the Lopez stream flowing out of Hummel Lake to Port Stanley.

Sincerely,

Hal A. Beecher
Instream Flow Biologist
Science Division
Habitat Program

cc: Rod Sakrison
Brad Caldwell
Bob Everitt