

## Summary of Question and Answer (Q&A) Session

Little Bear Creek Basin Plan Open House  
Snohomish County Public Works  
Surface Water Management  
Wednesday, June 21, 2017 6:00-8:00 p.m.  
Brightwater Community Meeting Room, Woodinville, Washington

### **Meeting Overview**

Tamie Kellogg, Kellogg Consulting, welcomed everyone to the meeting, explained its purpose, and encouraged attendees to take advantage of the Open House, Q&A session, and comment cards for getting their questions answered and voices heard.

Snohomish County Project Manager, Arthur Lee, and Northwest Hydraulic Consultants representative, Patty Dillon, presented the requirements, methodology, water quality findings, proposed actions, estimated costs and implementation timeline in the draft Little Bear Creek Basin Plan.

Tamie Kellogg facilitated a Q&A session for attendees. Answers were provided by Arthur Lee (Snohomish County), Patty Dillon (Northwest Hydraulic Consultants), Peggy Campbell (Snohomish County), and Karen Kerwin (Snohomish County).

The following is a summary of those questions and answers. Common themes in questions were consolidated for this summary.

### **Summary of Q&A**

**Q: What does “NHC” stand for?**

**A:** *Northwest Hydraulic Consultants*

**Q: What does “NPDES” stand for?**

**A:** *National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System. This is a program operated under the Federal Clean Water Act. It initially applied to wastewater treatment plants but has extended to certain types of industrial activities, like construction activities. Now it's been extended to counties and cities.*

**Q: What is the county's ultimate goal for this project?**

**A:** *The county's goal is to meet the requirements of Snohomish County's NPDES Permit; one of which is to develop a watershed-scale plan that includes strategies (actions and programs) expected to achieve water quality standards for the future projected build-out of the selected watershed study area.*

**Q: Was the modeling effort based on the Snohomish County build-out and the zoning that was adopted in 2015? How was the model built?**

**A:** Yes, the projected build-out incorporated in the modeling process was adopted by the 2015 Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan. The model was initially developed for current conditions in Little Bear Creek, so that it could be checked to be sure that it's representing the processes and the elements as best as possible. Then the land use distribution was changed to that of the future build-out scenario, as indicated in the current comprehensive plan. The result provided the baseline we used to develop the scope of projects needed to reach the target water quality standards.

**Q: If a baseline has been set for temperature, fecal coliform and B-IBI, how far off are we now and what does this mean for us?**

**A:** We have some of that information in the Basin Plan and in the appendix reports that show how far we are from the standards. We do not have specific information on how much impact this has on fish or on human health. A lot of these standards are based on a level that can be exceeded occasionally. However, when exceedances become a chronic condition, it's a problem.

**Q: Do you have a target temperature for the water - and how far are we off are we from it?**

**A:** There are temperature targets for different seasons, based on fish survival and health in different stages of their lives. During the summer that temperature target is 16°C (about 62°F) in winter it is 13°C (about 57°F). The temperature target can vary if the natural or forested condition is warmer. There is a comparison of temperature conditions, and a review of the temperature standards, in the Current Conditions Assessment and in the Stormwater Strategies.

**Q: Is there an issue with matter coming out of the septic systems and getting into creeks?**

**A:** We don't know the specific origin of the fecal coliform yet. As part of this basin planning project, the county is proposing a fecal coliform source study to understand where the sources of fecal coliform are in the basin: what types of sources they are, whether it is caused by natural, human or other type of activity. There are a lot of studies that show that septic systems contribute fecal coliform bacteria, primarily because many people don't know what type of septic system they have and how to properly maintain it.

**Q: How does the county manage the permitting process for new development so that it will meet the compliance standards?**

**A:** New development must meet the county's recently adopted stormwater management regulations. Our modeling indicates that this compliance will help to improve aspects of water quality over time. However, we still have existing development that was put in place under older, less restrictive requirements. For that, we have what is essentially an investment program. It's called a retrofit program, but it is really putting in best management practices throughout the watershed, whether it is on county or on private property. It is not something that is required for development beyond current code. It is something the county will be engaging in.

**Q: How can the county keep up with water quality standards given the speed at which the buildout is occurring?**

**A:** *The county is analyzing the projected buildout effects on water quality, but not waiting for the buildout, as we've developed the time table for planning and implementation. The comprehensive plan projects growth for a 20-year period but the buildout analyzed, which goes beyond that level of growth, covers a 30 year timeframe. Adaptive management will be incorporated to address any changes. The county will continue to monitor for B-IBI (benthic index of biotic integrity) and water quality. We will adaptively manage the proposed projects and programs, as we will be monitoring our progress and making changes as needed.*

**Q: What authority does the county have to say, “No you can't put these developments in because it doesn't meet the plan objectives”?**

**A:** *In terms of enforcing the goals of this Plan, we do not have requirements for new development, beyond what is in the current regulations. We do have proposed stormwater facility improvements that could involve collaboration with the private entities and agencies. In terms of compliance and enforcement, the Plan is sent to Ecology and then Ecology determines what further requirements would be needed for the next Permit.*

**Q: Based on what has been presented, would it be fair to say that if the county tries to manage the development up front, focusing on compliance from very beginning, there won't be issues requiring mitigation in the future? Please explain.**

**A:** *Not necessarily. The modeling results showed that (1) water quality problems are less in areas of new development built to current stormwater standards, and (2) the water quality problems in the basin were worse in older areas developed under previous, less rigorous stormwater standards. The new stormwater standards became effective January 2016. Developments permitted before 2016 were subject to the older stormwater standards, and their permits are good for three years. So there may be developments being constructed now or in the near future that were permitted prior to January 2016 under the older regulations.*

**Q: How do you determine if we are making the situation worse?**

**A:** *Based on the modeling results, future development does not appear to make things worse. It may, in some areas actually bring some improvements. Presently the study requires that we take some actions to reach water quality standards. The actions we will take to improve water quality will be adaptively managed, which will help us avoid making the situation worse.*

**Q: The model of new strategies will cost over a 30-year period, \$30K per acre. Is this cost typical for improving water quality?**

**A:** *That is the order of magnitude that we're seeing on similar studies conducted in other watersheds in the region. A study done on Juanita Creek cost approximately \$1.4B for about a seven square mile area.*

**Q: In light of the estimated Basin Plan cost and mention of other watershed scale stormwater studies, is the county challenging the assumptions in the models?**

**A:** *No. We're just saying that this is the order of magnitude which some of these studies are coming to. Snohomish County is required by permit to conduct this study, we conducted it to the*

*best of our ability, and we've put together what we believe is a responsive implementation plan and approach to it.*

**Q: The slide showed that Little Bear Creek Upper was like \$60K per acre and others were much less. What's the reason for that? Is it more polluted?**

*A: That area, known as Silver Firs, is more developed overall. Most of it was developed 20 or 30 years ago, prior to the level of stormwater treatment that we are requiring now. There are ponds there that provide some function, but they don't get the level of treatment that we need to reach current standards. We've found that areas of newer development (under current standards) contain facilities that are doing a pretty good job supporting water quality, but that areas of older development need to catch up.*

**Q: What is the consequence if Ecology does not approve the Permit?**

*A: The county has been under a stormwater permit since 1995. It's called a General Stormwater Permit and it's a five-year permit. The permit is reissued every five years, and conditions and requirements keep increasing each time. The Stormwater Plan was required for the first time as part of the requirements of this current five-year permit for 2013 through 2018. This plan was developed to meet the requirements and also do a little more than meet requirements. It will be submitted to the Department of Ecology by September 6, 2017. If Ecology determines that it doesn't meet requirements, then a Notice of Violation could be issued. But we believe the Plan will meet the requirements. The county does not have the money in the budget to implement the plan, and the Permit does not currently require implementation. Implementation would be a big effort and expense for a relatively small area of the jurisdiction. The county will be depending on grant sources and other sources of non-local funding for much, if not most, of this work.*

**Q: Can Ecology require that taxes are raised to implement the Plan?**

*A: No, Ecology cannot require rates to be raised.*

**Q: If Snohomish County doesn't get the grant money to implement the plan, will the county be fined?**

*A: No. The Permit does not require the county to implement the Plan or fund it unaided. There is a new NPDES permit coming out in another year and we will see what that one requires.*

**Q: Will residents get any kind of property-specific information back from allowing the county access to our property to conduct a field study?**

*A: Thank you for allowing us access to your property. This wasn't a specific inspection to judge or rate the quality at particular locations. We were looking for certain characteristics and features in the stream. We do have that data down to the levels that it was collected, so if you want to follow up, please speak with Patty Dillon (NHC). The information we received during this field study was compiled into a general report on the watershed. In the Current Conditions Assessment, you'll find an indication of the conditions that are happening on general reaches or segments of the system.*

**Q: Overall, should residents be concerned about water quality in the Little Bear Creek Basin?**

**A:** *Generally speaking, Little Bear Creek has pretty good water quality. It doesn't meet these standards, but most of our creeks around here don't. The standards are pretty tough to meet. There are things that can be improved, and we are hoping that the information we've provided will help raise awareness about those actions we can all take to protect water quality. Within this basin, water quality can occasionally reach levels of concern, but we are still in the phase that it's something to protect and restore.*

**General Comments**

A. Related to enforcement

- Came to learn more about the county's enforcement relating to water quality.
- Snohomish County provides limited resources for enforcement, which could jeopardize the Plan in the future.
- It is difficult to get ahold of anyone when you do have a complaint.
- There's a fear of allowing county staff onto property for testing, because they might find something that would cost the property owner a lot of money to fix.

B. Related to LID

- Would like to see more permeable pavement used in parking areas where water goes through so that the water has the chance to return to the soil.

C. Cost

- The cost for this plan is really high, and if water quality is not so bad, the cost seems disproportionate

D. General

- Acronyms should be explained first.
- A water and sewer district manager commented that sewers do a great job of reducing fecal coliform coming from that area and into the Basin. He was glad to see the good turnout for this public meeting, and stressed the importance of learning about actions to improve water quality, including not cutting down trees that shade water to keep the temperature down in streams.
- County staff noted their finance program for septic systems called Savvy Septic. (<https://snohomishcountywa.gov/2812/Savvy-Septic-Home>). Workshops are offered two times each year.
- County staff also noted that they are available to help with land stewardship issues, such as problems with invasive plants or drainage. Call Surface Water Management at 425-388-3464,