

May 31, 2005

Ms. Maxine Keesling  
15241 NE 153<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Woodinville, WA 98072

Dear Ms. Keesling:

Thank you for your public comment letter received on December 17, 2004, regarding Washington State's Water Quality Assessment for 2002/2004. The department received over 45 comment letters during this last review process and is appreciative of the time you took to review and comment on this assessment. We realize that there is an extensive amount of information in the Water Quality Assessment. The scrutiny given by you and other public reviewers has resulted in many changes and corrections that improved the accurateness of the final submittal to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The Water Quality Assessment is being submitted to EPA as an "integrated report" to meet the Clean Water Act requirements of sections 305(b) and 303(d). EPA will only take approval action on Category 5 of the assessment, which represents the state's 303(d) list. The Water Quality Assessment can be viewed at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/303d/index.html>.

You expressed concerns about 303(d) listings on Sammamish River and Bear Creek based on King County data. Data used for these assessments not only included King County, but in some cases Department of Ecology data and city of Redmond data. All data submitted must meet quality assurance procedures established by the Department of Ecology. This helps to ensure that the data submitted is valid.

We do try to identify the source of impairments where possible, and also try to identify if the exceedances are solely from natural conditions. However, trying to sort out natural conditions from human influences (such as failing septic systems) can be difficult, especially in the more urban areas. When data shows an exceedance, it can be the first indication that a problem may be occurring. The water is then placed on the 303(d) list, which is used to develop water cleanup plans (also called TMDLs) to improve water quality. It is at the TMDL stage that sources are fully identified and more study is done to determine sources and the extent of the problem. Regarding the age of data, we do require that data older than ten years not be used unless there is no new data to determine the actual quality of the water body. If we were to simply drop out-of-date excursions, it would not tell you whether improvements had been made, but would be viewed by many as a reason not to monitor the health of the waters.

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We understand your frustration with temperature impairments and what can be done practically to improve temperatures. Because temperatures can be warmer naturally at certain times of the year, it is a more complex parameter to deal with. Nonetheless, human activities, including water withdrawals, dam placement, and land management activities that destroy riparian areas along streams, can lead to an increase in natural stream temperatures which in turn has affected the health of salmon, a cold water fish. We continue to work with others to find ways to improve temperatures in streams where appropriate.

Thank you again for taking the time to provide comments to Ecology. If you have questions regarding the above responses, or would like further clarification, please feel free to call me at 360-407-6414.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Braley".

Susan Braley  
Unit Supervisor  
Watershed Management Section