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Director



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES

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March 6, 1992

Department of Ecology
Northwest Regional Office
3190 160th Avenue S.E.
Bellevue, WA. 98008-5452
ATTN: Steve West

SUBJECT: Cascade Creek Water Right Applications; Orcas Island;
WRIA 02.0057; San Juan County.

Dear Mr. West:

As per our phone conversation today I am sending this request to have a low flow set for the above creek. I recently responded to a Water Right Application (# SI-26308) from Victor Prescott and asked that it be denied. You mentioned to me that there were other applications for the same water source and that I should document the fish usage in this stream. This letter will address our concern.

Cascade Creek is a perennial stream which flows out of Mountain Lake, in Moran State Park, through a well-timbered and heavily vegetated buffer of natural understory. It flows into one of the most natural estuaries in the Puget Sound region, one that displays a multitude of intertidal habitats, which, in turn support a wide variety of the known species of intertidal invertebrates found in this region. Its seaward journey causes it to flow over a series of beautiful rock out-croppings, forming waterfalls, pools, and cascades. The low-gradient sections of this stream have a plentiful supply of gravel which, in combination with the excellent riparian vegetation, support an abundance of aquatic insect life and spawning salmon and trout.

The lower ~~reach~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~stream~~, from Buck Bay upstream to the first impassable waterfall, has a good population of naturally occurring coho salmon and sea-run cutthroat trout. There are also small numbers of eastern-brook trout which must have dropped out of the lake from earlier plants, as these are not native fish. Eastern brook are found throughout the channel upstream of the first anadromous barrier. There may also be native steelhead, but this has not been verified. Locals remember that coho were originally introduced to this stream many years ago, but the character of the stream and the presence of native sea-run cutthroat would indicate that coho were originally native to the stream.

Steve West
Page 2
March 6, 1992

For the past 6 years I have taught a fisheries class at Moran State Park, during the last week of July, to the Washington State Junior Sportsmen-Conservation Council. I have electro-shocked the above fish with the group and used this stream as an example of one of the most natural stream systems to be found anywhere in Washington. I have only once been there in the winter to verify the presence of adult salmon and missed the peak of spawning, observing several carcasses and at least 6 redds.

This creek has no development or recent logging in the watershed to create stream impacts normally associated with such disturbances. The only source of pollution comes from the several small areas where the creek crosses under the county road (several tires and some old refuse that was probably thrown out of cars). There is currently a proposal from the only resident on the creek, a Mr. Joseph Lawlor, to start a commercial oyster growing farm in the bay (he evidently owns most of the estuary). Such an aquaculture project will require that the creek remain un-polluted and have a continual supply of fresh water. The rate that we are losing our shellfish beds from pollution is alarming. All necessary measures to protect this bay should be taken as soon as possible.

As far as I have been able to determine, this is the only stream in the San Juan Islands that still supports a viable run of salmon and has, by far, the largest population of sea-run cutthroat trout in the islands.

Other than logging and development, the only impact that would seriously harm this stream, in its present state, would be an increase in the amount of water that is presently withdrawn for domestic use. I request that this stream be ~~protected~~ for any more Water Right Permits.

Thank you,

Mark Schuller
Mark Schuller
Regional Habitat Manager
(206) 428-1520

cc: WDF, Deusen