



## **King County**

### **Water and Land Resources Division**

Department of Natural Resources and Parks

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## **Cedar River Council DRAFT Meeting Notes**

**October 26, 2021 – 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm (scheduled)  
Meeting/Video Conference Call via Zoom (King County account)**

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### **I) Call to Order / Welcome**

Nathan Brown and Chair Max Prinsen called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

### **II) General CRC Announcements / Information (Open to All)**

Cedar River Councilmember Jeff Neuner raised the topic of a home recently demolished in the Cedar Rapids area and wanted to know King County's purpose and strategy of acquiring the property as it is not near the Cedar River. Councilmember Neuner also cited the recent hatchery litigation in the local paper and wondered if biologists in King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) had an opinion on claims of the hatchery "ramping up production in 2019 and doing irreparable harm." Nathan Brown, Chair Prinsen, and Cedar River Councilmember Frank Urabeck offered to discuss these issues outside of tonight's meeting.

Chair Prinsen asked about the old wooden road recently discovered on the Maple Valley Highway during a culvert replacement. Brown said he would research the topic. According to King 5 News, Chair Prinsen stated that the road was likely an old bridge, resulting in the highway's closure. Cedar River Councilmember Tom Allyn added that reports stated it was an old road from the 1930s prior to the building and paving of the Maple Valley Highway.

### **III) Flood Preparedness Resources Information for the Cedar River – Ken Zweig, King County River and Floodplain Management Section (RFMS)**

#### **A) Presentation**

Ken Zweig is a Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM) from the King County River and Floodplain Management Section (RFMS). Reports on pre-flood season are given annually to help residents of King County prepare for flooding season in the fall and winter and to provide access to resources both virtually and in person. Flooding season and preparedness is already underway, with the King County Flood Warning Center (FWC) anticipating the Snoqualmie River to have minor flooding, which is common for this time of year. The King County Flood Warning Program (FWP) is in its 61<sup>st</sup> year of providing residents information on flood preparedness.

The FWP, in collaboration with the King County Flood Control District (FCD), annually mails to floodplain residents brochures containing tips and resources for flood awareness. One of the most important things discussed in pre-flood season is having residents research if they live on a floodplain. FEMA-mapped floodplains are provided both in print and online to show where floodplain boundaries are located. Obtaining flood insurance is highly encouraged by the FWP, as flood damage can be very expensive. Emergency plans on evacuation, emergency kits and supplies, and power outage preparedness are also outlined in the brochure. Above all, it is highly recommended that concerned residents talk to neighbors, newer residents, and even perform public outreach about flood preparedness and high-risk areas in a floodplain like the Cedar River.

In terms of FEMA-mapped floodplains, the Cedar River is a rather narrow floodplain, unlike the Snoqualmie River for example, which has a wide floodplain, up to two miles wide in some areas. The Cedar River can be fast moving and very dangerous, and it is highly encouraged that people verify the high-risk areas using the FWP website. The website contains iMaps, where the public can search down to land parcel level and the Channel Migration Hazard Zone, which outlines possible river flow shifts during a flood. Another iMap feature contains historical photos that display a bird's-eye view of a certain location during a particular flood as opposed to just a model or shaded area.

Another resource on the FWP website is the Cedar River flood level viewer, which highlights 10 different flows to view the modelled flood inundation area. Zweig provided the example of a 'Phase 4' flood event at Landsburg, which goes up to 5,000 cubic feet per second (c.f.s.). The maps are based on a model, so not all flooding situations are exact. Blue areas indicate a model depth of how deep the expected amount of water would be in a certain

location. This flood viewer is currently only available for the Cedar River, however, this tool proved to be very useful during the most recent flooding of the river in February 2020.

The FWC can gather, analyze, and distribute flood information and has staff available to answer questions to help everyone make critical decisions at all times of a flood event. The FWC's goal is to convey any information regarding factors such as dam operations, weather forecasts, and particularly river flows. People are most interested in knowing what is to come in order to plan ahead. Public safety and having the best information possible are the FWC's highest priorities and it is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The current main concern is the upcoming atmospheric river forecasts per the National Weather Service (NWS), who provides models of current and forecasted river flows. The FWC relies heavily on various partner agencies to get the overall best information to distribute to the public.

Road closures are a major concern during floods, and the FWC contributes information on where road closures are located and estimated times of reopening via the 'King County My Commute' website. Public activity on monitoring road closures has increased in the past few weeks. Flood patrols are also dispatched to observe conditions for possible evacuation and levee function. Emergency repairs can be performed, but they are not always possible as it can be dangerous and challenging when the area is flooded. However, it is best for patrols to monitor the situation closely in case information needs to be given to emergency responders. The FWC is always open to and greatly encourages public observation and feedback regarding real-time flooding events from those that live on or near the Cedar River.

Zweig referred to the highly popular King County Flood Warning website ([www.kingcounty.gov/flood](http://www.kingcounty.gov/flood)) as well as the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) section that measures local flood gauges in the floodplains. This website features flood gauge data, forecast data, and flood phases that indicate flood severity and guidance. Flood phases occur in four levels: Phase 1 signifies closer monitoring with no flooding expected, Phase 2 prompts the FWC to open with typical flooding in low lying areas, Phase 3 triggers flood patrols and alerts, and Phase 4 anticipates a major flooding event. The Cedar River flood in February 2020 equated to a Phase 4 level resulting in many damages. The Flood Warning mobile app is also highly used, displaying the various flood phases of rivers throughout King County. Zweig recommended the public sign up for flood alerts which they can receive via phone calls, text, emails, or all three methods. Alerts only occur during Phases 2 through 4 on any King County river.

Lastly, sandbags are a common item asked about by locals. There are many sandbag distribution sites throughout King County. Sandbags are not delivered and are provided through a self-service operation. Making sandbags before flooding is preferred. The closest distribution sites to the Cedar River are in Renton and Black Diamond, which may not be convenient for some, however, advanced sandbagging is strongly advised. The FWC operates at the King County Emergency Management Building in Renton for large events and remotely for small events.

#### **B) CRC Member and Public Comment / Q & A**

- **Q:** How do you coordinate with Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) regarding flood control operations in both pre-flooding and flooding seasons?

**KZ:** The FWC communicates with SPU on a regular basis, particularly when we see atmospheric river conditions like this. We want to know as much as we can about dam operations. Many know that the dams on the Cedar River are mainly designed for water supply but they also have a flood control function. Flood control is not the main purpose, but there are benefits from it in relation to the dams. We are in regular contact with dam operators throughout a flood event and our role is to pass that information on to the public, which is why we encourage people to call the FWC so they know what to expect. The questions most often asked by the public are "What is going to happen at the dam?" and "What types of releases are going to happen at the dam and when?" and we try and relay those questions to the dam operators.

**Amy LaBarge (SPU):** I just want to remind folks that my responsibility and that of my colleagues is watershed management and we work closely with our sister utility company Seattle City Light, who is the asset owner and operates the dam in close coordination with SPU. We are regulated by the Washington Department of Ecology for the Masonry Dam which sets fill limits that we try to stay within. During flood season, we are actively watching river flows and forecasts and managing to limit flooding downstream as much as we are able. We are always balancing multiple objectives, but our primary mission is in water supply, not flood management. If there are any other questions, I am happy to bring them back to SPU and answer them.

- **Q:** Where are you at on your flood pocket, Amy?

**AL:** We are pretty darn good. The Masonry Pool has been drawn down and we have a lot of room in Chester Morse Lake so we should be able to catch any flows from this rain event as far as I know.

- **Q:** Have you looked into new conveyor dump trucks that throw materials 60-100 feet away from the truck to respond to emergency situations such as a failing dike or revetment?

**KZ:** I do not know about that type of truck. We have many engineers on our staff we can call in if we detect any problem on a revetment or levee. An assessment is done to see if we can perform any possible repair. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has that capacity as well, but I do not know any specifics about particular equipment, it just depends on staff availability on the level of event.

Cedar River Councilmember Ron Straka of the City of Renton commented on a situation in one of the recent Phase 4 floods where it appeared the river was receding. There was a decision to release water from the dam and a concerned citizen who sandbagged was not alerted of the release that occurred around 3 a.m., resulting in an overflow of their revetment. The citizen later raised awareness of the issue at a CRC meeting. Councilmember Straka observed that it would give people a false sense of security in that situation and urged that another alert should be sent out in future situations like this and inform residents that a dam release is not a natural occurrence. Zweig agreed and added the alerts—in addition to when rivers are in Phases 2 to 4—are also sent out during emergency situations, and this appeared to be classified as an emergency. Zweig mentioned the USGS Water Alert, another notification service for river flow gauges. Councilmember Straka proposed a Phase 5 above 5,000 c.f.s. in the case of the Cedar River due to its unpredictable nature and higher flows, which Zweig offered to bring to the FWP team.

- **Q:** Is there a photographic and orthographic layer of the Cedar River in iMap so that we can get an aerial view?

**KZ:** Yes, you can switch from the generic map to an aerial photo and you can pick different years in which the aerial photos were taken. The orthographic layer is in the Base Map Gallery.

Councilmember Neuner requested that the public should know the length of time it takes for water to flow from Landsburg to Renton so that they have a notion on how quickly they need to prepare in a flood event. Zweig confirmed per the USGS gauges at both Landsburg and Renton, water flow time is approximately 6 hours. Councilmember Straka seconded that based on PK models, flow between the two locations depending on velocity runs from 4-6 hours. Zweig will talk to the FWP's flood modelling team to receive more guidance on flow times.

Chair Prinsen referred to a prevalent complaint about the location of sandbags and suggested the Maple Valley Fire Station as a sandbag location. It would give people time to get what they need in a highly flooded area. Zweig mentioned there originally was an interest in a community response group operating something similar and the FWC would be willing to partner with someone, but nobody wants to undertake it right now. If a group is willing to do so and there are enough people to operate it, King County could provide sand and bags. Councilmembers Straka and Allyn recommended Cedar Hills Landfill and the museum in Maple Valley as sandbag locations.

- **Q:** What sort of commitment do you need from the community?

**KZ:** Mainly site management, going by on a regular basis and checking on the amount of sand and bags and alerting the FWC if supply is running low as well as coordination and agreement to operate such a site.

**Chair Prinsen:** Maybe we can contact the Maple Valley City Council and see if there is some interest there.

- **Q:** If we do have a major flooding event on the Cedar this year, would you be willing to come back to another CRC meeting and bring some follow-up information?

**KZ:** Absolutely! We have a whole team working on Cedar River issues, so I would be happy to bring them too.

#### IV) CRC Updates (As Needed)

- **Lakeside Industries Asphalt Plant**

There were no updates provided during this topic.

- **WRIA (Water Resource Inventory Area) 8**

Cedar River Councilmember Corinne Helmer confirmed the latest fish counts per the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) with coho salmon at 29,819, Chinook salmon at 14,229, and sockeye at 38,619 fish, respectively. Nathan Brown recalled the Chinook count at only 12 when he first joined the CRC many years ago.

- **Fish Habitat Conservation/Restoration (Sockeye)**

Councilmember Urabeck reiterated the aforementioned sockeye fish count at the Ballard Locks. However, the accuracy of the numbers was questioned because the sockeye were diverted to the locks directly instead of the fish ladders due to pinniped (seal) predation. The numbers are still larger than the pre-season forecast of 24,807 fish, giving encouragement to bringing back the sockeye salmon run. According to WDFW, an estimated 20,000 sockeye entered the Cedar River this year, compared to only 3,000 in 2020.

With the cooperation of the City of Seattle, the Muckleshoot Tribe, and WDFW, fish were taken directly from the Ballard Locks this past summer and transferred to 20-foot diameter holding ponds filled with cold spring water. The total number of brood stock (breeding) fish from the holding ponds and concrete raceways was 2,859, with 768 spawned up until the day before this meeting. The pre-spawn mortality rate of the fish was significant at 1,171, nearly 41% of fish counted. The brood stock of 279 fish taken from the Ballard Locks into the round hatchery

ponds had only two mortalities. The ware trap near Interstate 405 captured 291 fish which were transferred to the ponds to monitor the pre-spawn mortality in the ponds versus the concrete raceways. Of those in the ponds that traveled all through the Lake Washington Ship Canal to the Cedar River, pre-spawn mortality was only 14%, compared to over 50% when fish were directly put into concrete raceways. Brood stock of 577 fish were taken from the trap at the Landsburg Fish Ladder and suffered a 46% pre-spawn mortality rate.

Councilmember Urabeck concluded that there was a huge reduction in pre-spawn mortality by taking sockeye from the Ballard Locks and placing them into the cold-water holding ponds. Such a reduction was a breakthrough and the experiment exceeded expectations. Many hatchery biologists have also noted that concrete raceways are a problem due to both the structural nature and the high pre-spawn mortality rate.

The expectations are that roughly 3 million fry (baby fish) should be produced this year, up from 800,000 in 2020. The Ballard Locks transfer is supposed to account for 380,000 fry, or 13% of the total. These numbers provide hope and encouragement for the future of the sockeye and salmon in general. Per the Muckleshoot Tribe, Councilmember Urabeck reported 14,223 Chinook counted compared to 12,757 in 2020. The 10-year average count is 8,015 Chinook. Roughly 1,000 Chinook are estimated to escape into the Cedar River this year, with 75% of that being fish of natural origin (wild). The Endangered Species Act listing in 1999 reflected the count of wild Chinook at 455 in escapement, with only 503 in escapement in 2020, ultimately showing little improvement in fish returns despite massive funding efforts.

In conclusion, Councilmember Urabeck stated that there has been a big rebound this year, however, overall trends on the Cedar River have still not been great despite multiple recovery efforts. The State of Washington is currently undergoing a process to reexamine current trends to improve conditions. Over \$1 billion was spent on Puget Sound habitat restoration and recovery and there has been no scientific validation on if the efforts have made a huge difference. The ocean itself is believed to be the dominant factor in affecting fish runs. There is good news for coho salmon, which had a late fish run, but numbers are still climbing as they go through the Ballard Locks and above the Landsburg Fish Ladder. Councilmember Urabeck reiterated there is still hope; it will be tough, but worth it.

- **Cedar River Watershed**

Amy LaBarge, CRC liaison from Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), reported no major updates. LaBarge commented everything has held up well in the upper Cedar River watershed during the current flood season given the rain and winds. SPU experienced a staffing shortage due to statewide and local COVID-19 vaccine mandates, but SPU is managing through the changes.

- **King County Flood Hazard Management Plan Update**

Nathan Brown reported that the plan will be updated going into 2022.

## **V) Public Comment Period**

Chair Prinsen raised the issue of the lack of attendance in CRC Zoom meetings and requested that tonight's attendees ask cohorts (especially long-time CRC members) why they may not be attending. Feedback from those attending and not attending and raising awareness on current CRC projects to help boost attendance were also requested. The CRC has been recently involved in issues concerning the Ballard Locks and the Lake Washington Ship Canal. Chair Prinsen proposed contacting participants and outside partners but also looking further than mainstem issues in the Cedar River, as all the issues concerned contribute to one another.

Nathan Brown opened the floor for discussion, asking attendees if the topics addressed by the CRC were still important and relevant as changes may need to occur over time. All attendees agreed the topics were still important. Councilmember Urabeck pointed out that since the CRC has been in existence, it has entered in on major issues and is the only public forum promoting movement on these issues. Many know that the CRC exists, and surprisingly, some of the best attendance has occurred during flood season due to the CRC's knowledge and resources. In the case of fish, Councilmember Urabeck indicated the CRC is currently the only public forum on attempting to recover fish runs in the Lake Washington Basin, particularly sockeye salmon. The biggest questions are: what services can the CRC provide, and what makes the CRC valuable?

Brown mentioned in-person and large events generated a huge turnout in previous years and asked attendees about the comfort level of continuing virtual Zoom meetings and evening meeting times. Councilmember Allyn commented on the benefits of the Zoom meetings as there have been multiple in-person meetings in which Allyn was unable to attend. Many have become more accustomed to Zoom meetings since COVID-19 and are more comfortable with it. Councilmember Allyn was also surprised there have not been more attendees since switching to Zoom. Brown announced that a survey will be sent to attendees to help with feedback to improve meetings and membership.

#### **VI) Closing/Adjourn**

Chair Prinsen thanked all attendees for coming and reiterated reporting any feedback and other projects that should involve the CRC, especially with immediate issues such as the coming winter weather and flooding. The next meeting will be November 16, 2021. Meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.