



October 12, 2016

Tom Slocum  
Chair, SRFB Review Panel  
Recreation and Conservation Office  
PO Box 40917  
Olympia, WA 98504-0917

Re: San Juan County WRIA 2 Lead Entity, Zylstra Lower Lake Acquisition, #16-1293

Dear Chairman Slocum,

I am writing to clarify misunderstandings and factual errors made in the September 28, 2016 Post-Application Review Panel Comments.

The False Bay Watershed is the largest watershed in San Juan County and restoration of its anadromous fish populations is a long-standing goal of this island community. Acquisition of Lower Zylstra Lake and its associated water rights is intended to help facilitate that goal.

The SRFB-funded Washington Water Trust (WWT) study *False Bay Flow and Habitat Assessment* (2012) supports the approach we are taking with Lower Zylstra Lake. That study concluded that within the False Bay Watershed, "...today's flows are lower than historic flows and low flows begin earlier in the season and last longer than they did in the past. The decline in salmonid populations is likely related to the changes from historic flow patterns that increased the magnitude and duration of the low flow season."

The Town of Friday Harbor, along with many other users, withdraw some 10% of the estimated available water in this watershed. Much of that water is exported out of the watershed or is lost to evapotranspiration, and is not available for anadromous fish restoration. The WWT report goes on to state "...**releases from water stored in ponds and lakes** (emphasis added) *represent optimal flow restoration potential.*" The report's Executive Summary concludes, "...opportunities for flow restoration are very limited in the False Bay Watershed. **Flow enhancement may be achieved by working with the owners of private storage impoundments to manage in ways that benefit downstream flows.**" The proposed Zylstra Lower Lake Acquisition Project seeks to acquire and manage water for the benefit of anadromous fish, consistent with the conclusions and recommendations of the WWT report.

Furthermore, this acquisition project is part of a much larger vision for restoration of the False Bay Watershed and protection of the UW False Bay Biological Preserve. It is not only freshwater habitats which will benefit from this restoration; the health of documented forage fish spawning beaches and intertidal habitats in False Bay will also benefit, as will juvenile salmon migrating and feeding in the nearshore which utilize the lower reaches of False Bay Creek.

The Review Panel comments including, "Lower Zylstra Lake site would work better towards restoring natural processes through the removal of the impoundment..." do not reflect the realities of this watershed, nor is it consistent with the WWT findings.

Because restoration of the False Bay Watershed depends upon enhancing water quality and quantity, the San Juan Conservation District is now developing a watershed model through a Planning Implementation and Flow Achievement (PIFA) grant to provide additional hydrology data, including water temperatures. The results of this study will be available next summer and will inform next steps in the restoration process.

Water quality is also dependent on riparian habitat restoration between Zylstra Lake and False Bay. Approximately 46% of the riparian corridor is already under permanent conservation protection as preserve lands owned by non-profit organizations and/or government agencies or as conservation easements (CE) held on private lands. For this round, the False Bay Creek Acquisition and Planning project will include acquisition of a riparian Conservation Easement and is proposed for SRFB funding (#16-1670).

I hope this letter will serve to address concerns presented in the latest Review Panel comments on the Lower Zylstra Lake Acquisition project.

Sincerely,



Tim Seifert  
Executive Director