



Persistence pays off in Lake Tapps deal

Posted by Kim Bradford - The News Tribune

Tuesday, April 14th, 2009

The pending agreement to ensure summer lake levels would be a major breakthrough in the community's decade-long fight.

Boaters and fishermen, rejoice. A deal in the offing could help ensure that your beloved Lake Tapps will be around for decades to come.

What a difference a year – and a new face – can make. About this time last spring, tensions between the Lake Tapps community and a coalition of east King County cities and water districts were running high.

Cascade Water Alliance has been hailed as Lake Tapps' savior when it announced in 2005 that it would buy the artificial lake for a future drinking water source. The community figured it had won its years-long effort to keep Pierce County's largest lake from drying up after its reason for being – Puget Sound Energy's White River Hydroelectric Project — shut down.

But concerns soon began to mount about whether Cascade's needs to supply drinking water to its customers and meet fish-protection standards would inevitably leave too little water in the lake for summer recreation.

Auburn, Bonney Lake and Sumner went so far as to make a last-minute offer to buy the lake from PSE to preclude the prospect of an absentee owner. When that failed, the cities approached the alliance about collaborating, but were essentially rebuffed.

Cascade said it was still negotiating with tribes over flows in the White River and couldn't commit to

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anything else until those deals were done. But for wary community members, being put off was further proof that their interests didn't rate with Cascade.

In a March 2008 letter to the state, Pierce County Councilman Shawn Bunney and state Rep. Chris Hurst, D-Enumclaw, accused Cascade of treating the Lake Tapps community as "nothing more than a necessary annoyance."

Bunney is a great deal more complimentary these days. He credits Cascade's new CEO – Chuck Clarke, a former Department of Ecology director and Environmental Protection Agency regional administrator – with changing the dynamic.

Clarke took a fresh look at the data, concluded that there was enough water to meet everyone's needs and then personally put in long hours to resolve the dispute.

The result is a breakthrough in the Lake Tapps community's decade-old fight: a pending agreement that will give lake levels top priority in the summer months.

Cascade, for its part, gets some additional assurance that its planned \$1 billion investment at the lake is sound. Managing an asset as a community partner rather than an occupying force tends to ensure fewer headaches and legal bills.

The deal is also a big win for lakefront homeowners who have a vested interest in protecting their views and property values. But their efforts will also preserve a recreational gem for all of Pierce County.

The spirit of the agreement bodes well for the nearby cities' hopes of sharing Cascade's drinking water supply. It's a good outcome all around.

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