



Water alliance, Lake Tapps CC sign agreement

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By Dennis Box

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Good Friday became a day of smiles, handshakes and toasts for the Lake Tapps community and Cascade Water Alliance.

The Lake Tapps Community Council and Chuck Clarke, chief executive officer for Cascade, signed a memorandum of agreement Friday at the Tapps Island Club House.

The agreement will protect the recreation level of the lake and give the region, including the Covington Water District, an ongoing drinking water resource. The memorandum potentially brings to a close 10 years of anxiety, anger and potential litigation over the future survival of the reservoir.

The high points of the agreement from the document are as follows.

- "Cascade will maintain "Normal Full Pool" (defined as a water surface elevation between 542.2 msl (mean sea level) and 543.7 msl) from April 15 through Sept. 30 each year for thirty years (anticipated through 2040) or until use of Lake Tapps for municipal water supply commences, whichever is later."
- "After 2040 or following commencement of use of Lake Tapps as a municipal water supply, Cascade will maintain "Normal Full Pool" from April 15 through September 15 each year."
- "After 2040 or following commencement of use of Lake Tapps as a municipal water supply, Cascade will maintain "Normal Full Pool" from Sept. 15 through Sept. 30 more than 90 percent of the time."

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- “Cascade will make all reasonable efforts to maintain “Normal Full Pool” from Oct. 1 to Oct. 31 in all years.”

“This is a pretty momentous occasion,” Leon Stucki said, a community council member representing Snag Island. “It’s a good deal for the community and there was a lot of hard work behind the scenes. It was great working with Chuck Clarke.”

Clarke said the community members were knowledgeable and their technical models and analysis were accurate.

“That brought us to a level of trust.” Clarke said. “(The agreement) guarantees lake levels for recreation. The substance is it gives Cascade a back seat to lake levels and we were able to reach an agreement.”

Cascade is purchasing the lake from Puget Sound Energy (PSE) which has owned the lake for about 100 years. The energy utility used the lake as a reservoir for the White River hydroelectric plant, which was closed in January 2004 due to the high cost of obtaining a hydroelectric license.

In 1997 PSE found the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission requirements and the associated costs for a license made the hydroelectric plant too expensive to operate.

By 1999 the community realized the lake was in jeopardy, affecting all who lived on or near the lake and the cities surrounding the body of water.

In 2003, the Department of Ecology issued the drinking water rights to PSE, which appeared to be the path to saving the lake for recreation and bringing a needed water source to the region.

Shortly after the drinking water rights were issued, the decision was appealed by The Puyallup Tribe of

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Indians, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, the cities of Auburn, Pacific, Algona and Buckley, along with private citizen Robert Cook.

In 2004 the Pollution Control Hearings Board ruled Ecology had to reconsider the water rights decision once PSE closed the hydroelectric plant.

Since 2004 the community, the cities surrounding the lake – Auburn, Bonney Lake and Sumner – Cascade, PSE and political leaders have been locked in a roller-coaster ride of negotiations, deals and drama.

The three cities made an offer to buy the lake in September 2007, but Cascade closed a \$39 million deal with PSE in February 2008. Cascade agreed to pay \$25 million for the lake and \$5 million once the water rights clear any challenges from the tribes. The other \$9 million is for operational costs.

Cascade signed agreements with the tribes in June 2008 paying mitigation funds of \$6.8 million to the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and \$8.5 million to the Puyallup Tribe of Indians. According to Cascade officials, the agreements with the tribes settled all issues between the parties including flows of water in the White River and protection of fish.

A barrier or diversion dam in Buckley diverts water from the river to a flume that fills the lake. Water is released from the lake and returns to the river near Sumner.

The details of the agreement must be finalized and approved by Cascade's board of directors and the community council. The process is expected to take about 30 days according to Clarke. Once the agreement has been finalized, officials predicted the water right could be completed by the summer.

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