



Deal reached to save Lake Tapps

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By Mike Archbold

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Guarantees homeowners have demanded for a decade that Lake Tapps maintain its summer recreational level are nearly a done deal.

The promises are contained in a memorandum of agreement signed Friday by the Lake Tapps Community Council and officials for Cascade Regional Water Alliance, which plans to tap the lake as a regional water source.

Pierce County Councilman Shawn Bunney, who helped draft the agreement, said it provides for the needs of fish in the White River, drinking water and lake levels.

Champagne flowed and applause erupted at the Tapps Island Community Clubhouse as the memorandum was signed, said Community Council President Chuck Romeo.

"It's looks pretty good," he said Monday. "The onus is now all on them (Cascade). They will keep the lake up so we don't have to worry."

He credited the breakthrough to Cascade's new chief executive officer, Chuck Clarke, who was hired in January after many years with Seattle Public Utilities.



PHOTOS BY JANET JENSEN/THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Water splashes against the shore at Lake Tapps North Park, where Mark Zika of Auburn braves the elements while fishing on a rainy Monday afternoon.



Houses — including these homes seen from Lake Tapps North Park — line much of the shores of Lake Tapps, whose future has now been protected.

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and tomorrow



Clarke said Monday that he sat down with homeowners for at least 60 hours of meetings.

A new look at water data and future demands led to the conclusion that the summer recreation lake levels can be maintained, he said.

Lake Tapps homeowners have fought to protect the lake level since 1999, when they first learned Puget Sound Energy was giving up its nearly 90-year-old hydroelectric system on the lake.

They were faced with the lake drying up if some other use couldn't be found for it. In 2001, the Cascade Water Alliance, a consortium of East and South King County cities and water districts, agreed to turn it into a regional water source.

Lakefront residents didn't trust Cascade to protect their interests over drinking water demands and tribal fishing rights on the White River. A dam at Buckley diverts White River water to fill the lake.

The two sides have 30 days to formalize the new agreement, which will be part of the 2004 Lake Tapps reservoir management plan.

Under the terms of the agreement, Cascade guarantees to keep the lake at "normal full pool" (between 542.2 feet and 543.7 feet above sea level) from April 15 through Sept. 30 each year for the next 30 years.

Monday, the lake was at "normal full pool" at 542.27 feet and ready for the summer boating season.

After 2040, or when Cascade expects to begin drawing water from the lake, Cascade agrees to maintain "full pool" from April 15 to Sept. 15.

After 2040 Cascade also agrees to keep the lake full more than 90 percent of the time from Sept. 15

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through Sept. 30. Efforts will be made to keep the lake at full level in October in all years.

Leon Stucki, the Snap Island representative on the Community Council, said Clarke brought a new spirit to solve the problem, which has cost homeowners more than \$150,000 in legal bills.

“Basically, the thing that has changed is that he is willing to guarantee the lake level over withdrawal for consumptive purposes,” Stucki said, explaining that during the April-to-September period the lake’s needs will be placed above those of fish and drinking water.

State Sen. Pam Roach, R-Auburn, said Cascade “wanted a long-term friendly relationship with the (lake) community. Being at odds is not where they wanted to be.”

“We have guaranteed lake levels and promises in writing about what we will do (during droughts) when there is not so much water,” she said.

Cascade also has signed agreements with the tribes over flows in the White River to protect fish.

The group still is negotiating with Auburn, Sumner, Bonney Lake and Buckley over future sharing of water from the lake.

Auburn Mayor Pete Lewis said Monday that Cascade’s agreement on lake levels shows a willingness to negotiate that he hopes will extend to the cities.

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