

Pierce County Planning and Public Works

General Comments:

1. Language in this guidance is consistently vague or suggestive, rather than specific. It gives the impression of flexibility but actually creates uncertainty. This is unfortunate because the implications of the plans are likely to be broad-reaching and costly.
2. The assumptions and methods used to calculate benefits are undefined, and there is a great deal of subjectivity. If the merit of projects are to be compared and ranked for the purpose of funding, there needs to be an equitable method for evaluation—or at a minimum a common language among the plans.

Page 2: Definition of NEB: "A Net Ecological Benefit determination means anticipated benefits to instream resources from actions designed to restore streamflow will offset and exceed the projected impacts to instream resources from new water use."

Comment: 'Anticipated benefits' and 'designed to restore' suggest a certain level of uncertainty associated with conceiving potentially successful mitigation projects—particularly those of a hydrogeological nature (e.g., shallow or deep water injection) that may create unintended consequences elsewhere. What tools are available to ensure the consistent evaluation of these uncertainties with regards to the disparate data sources and watershed variables?

Page 2, Paragraph 5

Comment: How will local information on watershed-specific factors be consistently assessed and incorporated, particularly in watershed that may not have relevant studies, reliable long-term data sets, or previously developed groundwater and surface water models (i.e. MODFLOW, HSPF)?

Page 3, Paragraph 7

Comment: What constitutes 'structured and transparent accounting' that 'should' be used in NEB evaluation? The guidance assumes data and tools are available to develop a credible accounting system. It is unlikely that such data and tools are available all watersheds. More importantly, in the case of qualitative evaluation, what structures are in place to equitably relate these qualitative estimates across projects in various jurisdictions?

Page 4, Element 1:

Comment: In Element 1, when proposing quantification of 'potential impacts', it would be beneficial to provide further guidance on what parameters or scenarios must be considered (time scale, extreme weather events, drought, natural disaster, etc.).

Comment: Element 1 assumes there is local knowledge that links together rainfall, runoff, stream stage, groundwater, consumptive use, regenerative use, in-stream hydraulics, habitat dynamics, and species-specific environmental requirements. Without specific knowledge, determinations are based on the professional judgement of staff who are unlikely to have experience in all the disparate scientific and legal fields that overlap on this issue. Due to the complexity of these intersections, it is quite likely that key elements will be overlooked.

Page 6, Paragraph 3, second sentence, ("Non-water offset projects must be in addition..." :

Comment: This is a cumbersome sentence that is difficult to understand.