November 2019

Lara Henderson, Water Quality

TMDL Program Planner

Department of Ecology, Headquarters

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Dear Lara,

I write on behalf of the Friends of Vancouver Lake, a Clark County, Washington non-profit advocacy group to respectfully request that the Department of Ecology elevate Vancouver Lake and its tributaries to a high priority in the state’s current TMDL process.

Despite its long status as a 303(d) Category 5 water body (since 2004), Vancouver Lake’s issues have not yet gained the notice they deserve. Unlike many watersheds in Washington, the Lake lacks a strong surrounding residential ownership to spearhead any call to action. It appears to us that the Lake has not been elevated for high priority in state funding due to multiple public entities with ownership interests in the Lake but no single, clear advocate. Adding the Lake as a top priority for TMDL would provide a necessary lever for holding stakeholders accountable.

Therefore, Friends of Vancouver Lake are formally submitting to the Department of Ecology a request to have Vancouver Lake receive a written TMDL’s in this upcoming selection cycle.

The Lake’s 2,300 acre surface and groundwater resources are a critical component for the entire lower Columbia River region supporting over 200,000 migratory waterfowl and hosting a variety of salmonids, including lower Columbia chum, Chinook, and steelhead. In addition, members of the community enjoy numerous recreational opportunities at the lake: competitive rowing, sailing, and paddling, as well as swimming, hiking, fishing, and birdwatching. Vancouver Lake Regional Park is a 190-acre park that stretches along 2.5 miles of the west shore of the lake and includes a popular sandy beach. All of these activities are severely limited as a result of the Category 5 issues including intermittent closures due to toxic blue-green algae blooms.

Friends of Vancouver Lake formed in late 2018 to address the alarming increase of Eurasian Milfoil Weed in the Lake and immediately set to work raising $200,000+ from the community, gaining the support of local citizens, city, county and Port elected officials and securing a permit from DOE to treat the milfoil. Although our efforts began with the mission to treat milfoil, we are committed to addressing issues with the Flushing Channel, and Lake River as these bodies of water are also impaired and are interconnected in the watershed. We are happy to report to you that our community’s commitment to Vancouver Lake is stronger than ever.

Here are FoVL’s responses to the specific Department of Ecology criteria for TMDL prioritization:

1. **Severity of the pollution problem** – the Lake falls into Category 5 on temperature, PCBs, turbidity, bacteria in the water, total phosphorous, Deldrin and other toxins. Conjoined water bodies such as Lake River, Burnt Bridge Creek and Salmon Creek add to the Lake’s woes with their own Category 5 issues. *(See Document 1, attached)*
2. **Risks to public health** – each season the Lake and this community miss out on the opportunity to host thousands of competitive athletes and visitors to our Lake - the largest lake within a 50-mile radius of a major West Coast city and international airport (Portland) – via world, national, west coast, regional, and state competitive rowing competitions, dragon boating competitions, sailing regattas and outrigger canoe events due to blue-green algae blooms and E.coli issues. The same conditions affect swim beaches and community recreational uses such as sailing, kayaking, and paddle boarding. Risks to health from cyanobacteria are well established. We are working closely with Clark County Public Health to understand testing and noticing protocols while advocating for needed changes to support the lake’s year-round use.
3. **Risks to threatened and endangered species** – The Lake temperature, toxicity and shallow depth threaten salmonids, lower Columbia chum, Chinook and steelhead. We are working with the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife to understand opportunities and threats to the Lake’s inhabitants.
4. **Vulnerability of water bodies to degradation** – As temperature, toxicity, flow and dilution issues remain unaddressed and have multiplied, the Lake faces a new foe – Eurasian Milfoil Weed taking hold throughout the shallow waters threatening swimmers and recreation. Failure to address the need for increased flow of colder Columbia River water through the existing Flushing Channel – a waterway with only one Category 5 designation for temperature – warrants an updated hydrological study.
5. **Local support and interest in a watershed** – For more than 40 years, the Vancouver and Clark County communities have understood the enormous possibilities that Vancouver Lake represents for outdoor recreation, economic development and the important personal well-being that results from time spent recreating with family and friends in the beautiful outdoors.

Vancouver Lake Regional Park represents a major local resource for recreational shoreline opportunities that remains accessible to those with limited resources or using public transportation.

There is recent renewed interest in taking advantage of the Lake’s potential for public access and use. Clark County has been acquiring land along the shore through its Legacy Land program and has started to build a series of trails looping around the lake as part of the Lewis & Clark Regional Trail project *(See Document 2, attached)*. This is a major investment that underscores the belief that Vancouver Lake and surrounding watersheds are a major attraction for future public use. In addition, the new Vancouver Waterfront project is nearly complete and includes the Grant Street Pier, renowned restaurants, and a 7-acre waterfront park in addition to residential, retail and office space.

Strong support for this TMDL prioritization request comes from local citizens, local governmental agencies, our state representatives from the 49th legislative district, and private organizations. *(See Document 3, attached.)*

We ask that the Department of Ecology include Vancouver Lake for a written TMDL in the upcoming selection cycle.

Thank you,

Larry Cassidy

Co-Chair

Friends of Vancouver Lake

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Kathy Gillespie

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