Jacqueline Banks

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft water quality improvement plan for the Soos Creek watershed. Lake Sawyer, as part of the Big Soos Creek drainage basin, plays a critical role in the health of this watershed and its salmon-bearing streams.

Your plan rightly focuses on reducing excess fine sediment, which impairs aquatic habitat and degrades water quality. We want to highlight how Lake Sawyer's declining water levels contribute directly to this problem:
Low water levels increase lake temperatures, which stimulate excessive aquatic plant growth.
When plant material decays, it settles to the bottom, depleting oxygen and creating a murky sediment layer.
This murky, sediment-rich water flows downstream, adding fine particles to Soos Creek and impairing salmon habitat.
Delayed outflow from the Lake Sawyer weir postpones salmon access to Covington Creek, increases stream temperatures downstream, and disrupts fall migration and spawning.
This year, our region has faced severe drought, and while rainfall is slowly returning, it will take many months of sustained precipitation for the lake to recover to a level where the weir flows again. In normal years, even modest additional rainfall would trigger flow into Covington Creek during salmon migration.

One of the most significant contributors to this issue is groundwater pumping. As rainfall and creek inflows decline, Covington Water District (CWD) continues to pump from the 222nd Street wellfield, drawing from the same aquifer that recharges Lake Sawyer. The result is a continued drop in lake levels precisely when water storage is most critical for the ecosystem.

We believe it is vital that DOE help identify and confirm the connectivity between the 222nd Street aquifer and Lake Sawyer. Once established, this knowledge should inform water management practices to ensure lake levels are sustained during drought and critical salmon migration periods. Specifically, CWD should suspend or significantly reduce pumping once the Lake Sawyer weir reaches zero flow.

As climate conditions fluctuate from year to year, water management must be agile. Protecting Lake Sawyer is not only about preserving a single lake but also about ensuring the health of the entire Soos Creek watershed and its salmon populations.

We urge the Department of Ecology to:
Investigate aquifer-lake connectivity beneath the 222nd Street wellfield.
Require adaptive pumping practices by Covington Water District, especially during drought and when the weir is dry.
Incorporate Lake Sawyer's role into the Soos Creek TMDL plan to address fine sediment and water quality impacts downstream.
Thank you for your leadership in protecting Washington's waters. We hope DOE will recognize Lake Sawyer's importance and take action to ensure it continues to sustain the watershed, salmon habitat, and our community for generations to come.

I encourage you to review the devastating photos of our lake right now on our Facebook page.

Respectfully,

Jacqueline Banks
On behalf of Lake Sawyer Advocacy Group
LSAG - https://www.lakesawyer.org/lsag.html
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/LakeSawyerAdvocacyGroup