

## **Cooler water helps Puyallup officials relax**

Puyallup River sees improved quality, easing fears over tribe's proposed tougher standards.

ROB TUCKER; The News Tribune  
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An unexpected source is causing cooler water flows in the lower Puyallup River, and that could go a long way toward meeting tougher water-quality standards proposed by the Puyallup Tribe.

Since the White River Hydroelectric Project shut down at Lake Tapps last year, more water has been left in all parts of the river, the main tributary of the Puyallup.

Higher, continuous volumes in the glacier-fed White River have chilled the water downstream in the lower Puyallup, improving water quality and helping fish.

"Absolutely. The flows are key," said Char Naylor, tribal water quality manager. "It's making a big difference in Puyallup River water quality."

The tribe recently proposed stricter standards in its 7.3-mile section of river where tribal members fish, between the city of Puyallup and about a mile up from the river's mouth in Tacoma.

The most recent tribal water standards were issued in 1994. Tribal oversight of lower Puyallup River water quality was established by an 1854 treaty with the U.S., by the Indian Land Claims Settlement of 1988, and other federal laws.

The proposed revisions have worried river cities with sewage treatment plants, including the City of Puyallup. It discharges treated wastewater into the section of river under tribal jurisdiction.

The city completed a \$27 million upgrade to its sewage treatment plant five years ago and raised rates to help pay for it. City officials fear higher standards would mean even more plant upgrades and higher rates for customers.

Likewise, Sumner and Bonney Lake recently completed a \$22 million upgrade of their joint sewer plant on the lower White River. They share Puyallup's concerns because waters upstream that flow into the tribal control area must then meet tribal standards.

Naylor said the tribe received federal guidance in developing the stricter standards. The Puyallups must ensure that they follow the federal Endangered

Species Act. Spring chinook salmon and bull trout in the river are listed as threatened under the act and must be protected.

Puyallup city and tribal officials recently met about the proposal, and city officials are feeling better. So is the City of Sumner after learning that Puyallup River water quality is better than expected.

But Tom Heinecke, Puyallup's development services administrator, said last week that if tougher standards are adopted, the city still will have to modify its sewage plant and raise rates. He said he hopes the city can negotiate with the tribe to hold down costs.

Residents now pay \$45.29 per month for sewer service in Puyallup.

At a Puyallup River Watershed Council meeting last week, Naylor said lower Puyallup River quality is better than many people might have thought, although temperatures aren't quite cold enough to meet proposed standards.

When Puget Sound Energy ran its hydro project at Lake Tapps, it withdrew water at Buckley and returned it to the river at Sumner after running it through a power plant.

The withdrawals during warmer months left a long section of the lower White River with decreased flows, which would heat the water and lower quality.

This year there's cooler water in the lower Puyallup River because withdrawals to Lake Tapps are much smaller, just enough to top off the lake in the spring.

But everything isn't resolved yet. Other standards must be met for dissolved oxygen, fecal coliform and pH level, among others.

Lake Tapps residents worry that keeping higher flows in the White River at key times might prevent the lake from filling in the spring or from staying full in the summer, since water is lost to evaporation and seepage. A lower water level would hurt recreation in the heavily used lake.

To complicate matters, a group of King County water utilities has purchased Lake Tapps and plans to withdraw water for drinking. But the utilities will use much less water than Puget Sound Energy did.

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