March 29, 2012

Debbie Terwilleger, Director  
Snohomish County Public Works, Surface Water Management  
3000 Rockefeller Ave., M/S 607  
Everett, WA 98201

Dear Ms. Terwilleger,

At our March 22, 2012 Clean Water District Advisory Board (CWDAB) meeting, the Board discussed two serious surface water drainage problems now occurring in the CWD. One, of which you are aware, impacts the farmlands of Dike District 7 (DD7) north of Stanwood. Another is causing flooding in the fields of Drainage District 12 (DD12). With the growing season at hand, the Board wishes to register its concerns without delay.

DD7 – As you know, at several recent CWDAB meetings we've been advised by local farmers in Dike District 7 that increasing surface water peak flows from the Douglas Creek basin now consistently overwhelm the capacity of the DD7 agricultural drainage ditches, into which they empty. Heavy rains result in flooding of the fields, as shown in the attached photo. Water quality is also impacted, since the repetitive cycle of flooding and draining can transport into the ditches the residue of organic fertilizers applied in the growing season, and pass it into Skagit Bay.

The DD7 farmers further advised us on March 22 that this problem has been made acute by the recent failure of a tidegate facility in the DD7 sea dike. Hundreds of acres are at risk, and much of it will be unusable this year if an upgraded replacement facility is not installed, or other remedial actions are not taken immediately. However, DD7 lacks the funds for such an upgrade—even the most economical design approaches $100,000—and there is no prospect of an outside grant within the short timeframe.

The Board recommends that SWM verify this situation as soon as possible, and then that SWM direct CWD funds to assist DD7 as needed to provide immediate relief from this situation. A new tidegate facility has been proposed as the most appropriate solution, and the CWDAB endorses it; however, we defer of course to County engineers to decide on the best solution. In any case the CWDAB believes that CWD's financial assistance is appropriate, inasmuch as the CWD was established both to protect water quality and to “assist landowners with surface water problems.” DD7 landowners, having been paying the CWD fee for two decades while their District conveys the upland waters to the bay at no charge to the County, are, in our opinion, certainly deserving of this assistance.

DD12 – The CWDAB was advised by local farmers at the March 22 meeting of a flooding problem where a seasonal creek empties into the floodplain at the intersection of Pioneer Highway and Jackson Gulch Road. From there, the creek turns south to drain into the Stillaguamish River, but upland erosion has filled up the creek channel with gravel, diverting the rushing waters into the adjacent field and submerging a portion of Norman Road. To relieve the hazard to motorists, the County Roads department installed a shallow ditch along Norman Road, directing the flow northward into DD12. As a result, the DD12 ditches have filled to overtopping, fields are flooded (see photo), and essential farmland drainage is impaired for miles to the west.
We understand that Gregg Farris and other SWM personnel have visited the site, and have agreed that the problem is severe and should be addressed quickly. Several CWDAB members have also visited the site and confirmed the problem.

We understand from Mr. Farris that in the short term the County will be installing some sandbags along the side of the creek that is overflowing in order to contain the flows, and that they will also remove some debris by hand from the channel that may have been slowing the flows through this section of creek: the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has given permission to do this. Discussions are also under way, we are told, to remove the accumulated gravel from the stream channel and the culvert crossing Pioneer Highway during the dry season, and WFWD is working with the county on this. The CWDAB endorses this plan, and we encourage the County to continue with its rapid response. We also understand that there is support for this solution among other constituencies, which we hope will facilitate rapid progress through any required permitting processes.

The Board thanks SWM for its work with DD7 and the City of Stanwood to this point, and for its assessment of the DD12 problem. We request that you consider the above recommendations as a matter of urgency.

Respectfully,

John Connolly, Chair

Christine Betchley, Vice-Chair
DD7 Flooding
DD12 Flooding