



## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# Findings and Recommendations of the Farming in the Floodplain Project



The Farming in the Floodplain Project (FFP) is a collaborative project designed to advance progress toward a collectively agreed-upon plan for the Clear Creek area that improves agricultural viability while also meeting the goals of flood risk reduction and salmon habitat enhancement.

The FFP is one of four components of the Floodplains for the Future program, which is funded by a Floodplains by Design grant from the Washington Department of Ecology.

The FFP is related to, but independent from, the Clear Creek Floodplain Reconnection Project (Floodplain Reconnection Project) proposed by Pierce County Surface Water Management (SWM). As conceived, the Floodplain Reconnection Project involves construction of a ring levee around low-lying portions of the Clear Creek area to protect farms, houses, and infrastructure from backwater flooding from the Puyallup River, followed by removal of two tide gates where Clear Creek enters the Puyallup River.

The FFP formed a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to provide input on the project as it progresses. The TAG includes farmers, regional technical experts, and county staff. The TAG met six times in 2016 and 2017, covering topics such as agricultural viability, hydraulic modeling, sediment, and agricultural conservation easements.

The first technical work out of the FFP was an Existing Conditions Report which summarized existing information about physical conditions and trends in the Clear Creek area, identified information needs, and described the relationship between physical conditions and the viability of agriculture in the area.

After completion of the Existing Conditions Report, the FFP developed a series of technical memorandums on topics that required further attention, including:

- Sediment Conditions in the Puyallup River and Clear Creek
- Existing Flood Risk Conditions for Agriculture in the Clear Creek Area
- Drainage Inventory Memorandum
- Clear Creek Tide Gate Assessment Technical Memorandum
- Farmland Impacts Memorandum
- The Effect of Upstream Development on the Clear Creek Area Technical Memorandum

TAG meeting reports, the Existing Conditions Report, and all technical memorandums are available online at [www.farminginthefloodplain.org/resources](http://www.farminginthefloodplain.org/resources).



## In July 2017, the FFP put out a report with 14 Findings and Recommendations.

### Findings and Recommendations Related to Existing Conditions

**Agriculture in the Clear Creek area is important.** Impacts and benefits to agriculture and to agricultural viability should be considered for proposed projects in the area and impacts should be minimized or avoided where possible.

**Agricultural viability is better understood through the concept of risk than through quantifiable thresholds.** Current conditions in the Clear Creek area present a range of risks to agriculture each year, and actions in the area could increase or decrease those risks.

**Property acquisitions are already impacting agricultural viability.** SWM should identify strategies to discourage illegal activities on its properties in the Clear Creek area. Expansion of the boundaries of Drainage District 10 should be considered.

**Agricultural drainage in the Clear Creek area is poor and is the biggest current risk to agricultural viability.** Drainage District 10 should develop a Drainage Management Plan.

**Relying on Clear Creek for agricultural drainage is a barrier to agricultural viability.** Large-scale options to alter the drainage system should be considered.

**The flood system in the Clear Creek area is not resilient.** Pursuing a project that would increase flood resilience would be a benefit to agricultural viability.

**River Road Levee overtopping and/or breaching is currently the biggest flood-related threat to farms in the Clear Creek area.** Pierce County SWM and Clear Creek residents should continue to be involved in the Corps of Engineers General Investigation and encourage the Corps to address the River Road Levee problems.

**Sediment levels are high in the Puyallup River and Clear Creek and are a risk to agricultural viability.** Projects designed to reduce sediment inputs to the low-lying Clear Creek area could improve drainage and increase flood storage capacity.

**The wooden flap gate at the mouth of Clear Creek appears to be in poor condition.** The condition of the gate should be assessed, and any needed repairs should be made. The gate should be modified to increase agricultural drainage.

### Findings and Recommendations Related to the Clear Creek Floodplain Reconnection Project

**The Floodplain Reconnection Project is likely to negatively impact agricultural viability, but could be designed to minimize or avoid impacts and provide benefits.** Farmers should participate fully in the master planning process for the project.

**Farming on the wet side of the proposed levee is not likely to be feasible.** The master planning process for the Floodplain Reconnection Project should seek alternative ways to create benefits for agriculture.

**The proposed Floodplain Reconnection Project would increase the risk to agriculture if River Road Levee were to overtop or breach.** The timeline of the Corps of Engineers General Investigation needs to be considered as part of the Clear Creek master planning process.

**Groundwater in the Clear Creek area is not well understood and could have impacts for agriculture, particularly**

**with proposed projects and/or climate change.** Additional studies would help to understand and minimize the impacts.

**The lack of specific climate change information for the Clear Creek area makes it difficult to plan for agricultural viability in the future and to understand potential impacts of the proposed Floodplain Reconnection Project.** Climate change projections and modeling should be developed for the Clear Creek area.



The full *Findings and Recommendations Report* and more information on the Farming in the Floodplain Project can be found online at: [farminginthefloodplain.org/resources/](http://farminginthefloodplain.org/resources/)

### What is the Farming in the Floodplain Project?

The Farming in the Floodplain Project (FFP) is a collaborative project seeking to increase the understanding of agricultural viability and to analyze the impact of proposed changes to flood and hydrology systems on farmlands in the Clear Creek area of the Puyallup River Basin. The long-term goal of the FFP is to advance progress toward a collectively agreed upon plan for lands in Clear Creek that supports a thriving agricultural community while also meeting fish and flood interests. For more information, visit [www.farminginthefloodplain.org](http://www.farminginthefloodplain.org).