FARMING IN THE FLOODPLAIN PROJECT

How would the proposed Clear Creek Floodplain Reconnection Project affect agriculture in the Clear Creek area?

A Farmland Impacts Memorandum was prepared for the Farming in the Floodplain Project (FFP) to inform farmers about potential impacts of the proposed Floodplain Reconnection Project and to advance progress towards a multiple-benefit project that would minimize impacts to and provide benefits for farmland.

What is the Clear Creek Floodplain Reconnection Project?

Pierce County Surface Water Management is proposing to implement the Clear Creek Floodplain Reconnection Project in order to reduce flooding issues, improve habitat for wildlife, and potentially improve agricultural viability. The project would remove the tide gates at the mouth of Clear Creek to allow Puyallup River water to flow into the Clear Creek area, reconnecting the river to a portion of its historic floodplain. To reduce property damage, Pierce County would acquire property from willing sellers and construct a ring levee around the reconnected floodplain to protect property on the dry side of the levee. The project is still in the early planning stages and the County has not yet conducted the necessary engineering studies or prepared design plans.

Clear Creek Master Planning Process

Pierce County is planning to conduct a collaborative, facilitated master planning process for the Clear Creek Floodplain Reconnection Project. Clear Creek area farmers will have the opportunity to participate in that process. The Farmland Impacts Memo is intended to be a tool to inform the master planning process and to help the County develop a project that avoids or minimizes impacts to farmland and, ideally, improves agricultural viability in the Clear Creek area.

DEFINITION OF AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY

Agricultural viability can be defined as the ability of a farmer or group of farmers to:

- Productively farm on a given piece of land or in a specific area,
- Maintain an economically viable farm business,
- Keep the land in agriculture long-term, and
- Steward the land so it will remain productive into the future.

Findings from the Farmland Impacts Memorandum.

Selected findings of the memo include:

FLOOD RISK

Construction of the Clear Creek levee would increase the reliability of flood protection from Clear Creek backwater flooding for farmland on the dry side of the levee. However, constructing the Clear Creek levee before adequate freeboard is provided on River Road Levee would likely increase the level of risk to agricultural structures (like barns and farmhouses), equipment, livestock, and soil if River Road Levee is overtopped.

DRAINAGE

Requiring the agricultural drainage system to flow through the Clear Creek levee and the habitat area on the wet side of the levee would likely exacerbate current drainage problems experienced by farms in the Clear Creek area. However, the project could provide an opportunity to implement a large-scale change to the agricultural drainage system that could improve drainage over current conditions.

DRAINAGE DISTRICT 10

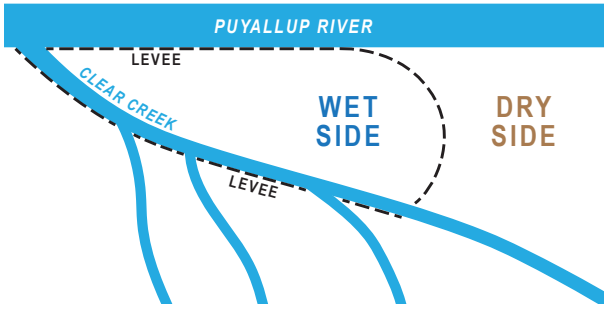
Viability of Drainage District 10 has been impacted by property acquisition reducing the pool of landowners who can serve as commissioners and uncertainty around the long-term future of the Clear Creek area due to the proposed project. These impacts are partially offset by the County assessment payments for the property it owns within the district.

POTENTIAL TRAIL

Clear Creek area farmers have suggested that the project could include a trail along or adjacent to the levee. A trail connecting habitat areas with farms could increase the visibility of farms in the area, allow for educational opportunities, and increase business for direct-market farms.

AGRICULTURE ON THE WET SIDE OF THE LEVEE

Pierce County has suggested that, depending on the levee alignment, it may be possible to farm on the wet side of the levee. The Farmland Impacts Memo evaluated this idea and determined that, due to the frequency of inundation, the potential for saltwater inundation in the future, access issues, and potential regulatory hurdles, farming on the wet side of the levee is unlikely to be feasible.



The extent, type, and degree of impacts will depend on the location, design, scope, scale, and timing of the project. Other topics evaluated in the memo include:

- Floodway designation of the Clear Creek area
- Groundwater and groundwater-surface water interactions
- Reduction of farm acreage
- Viability of the Riverside Fire District
- Impacts of vacant parcels adjacent to farms
- Regional agricultural viability
- Climate change
- Cumulative impacts with other projects in the area

Recommendations

The Farmland Impacts Memo identified potential impacts of the proposed project that would negatively affect agriculture. It also identified design considerations that could reduce negative impacts and, in some cases, provide benefits to agriculture. The master planning process should take a comprehensive approach so that issues affecting agriculture are considered along with the potential flood and habitat benefits.

The master planning process should give special consideration to:

- Minimization of the conversion of agricultural land,
- Incorporation of an effective drainage system into the project design,
- Maximization of flood protection for agricultural lands,
- Incorporation of climate change projections into the project design, and
- Development of plans to minimize indirect impacts.

The ***Farmland Impacts Memorandum*** can be found online at: **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**.