

February 23, 2009

Colonel Anthony Wright  
US Army Corps of Engineers  
P.O. Box 3755  
Seattle WA 98124-3755

Re: Howard Hanson Dam

Dear Colonel Wright,

Thank you for briefing the Executive Committee of the King County Flood Control District (“District”) regarding the status of damage to the Howard Hanson Dam. As we indicated, we are very concerned about this issue as the Howard Hanson Dam is the primary flood control facility for all of the Green River, protecting the cities of Auburn, Renton, Kent, Tukwila, and large areas of unincorporated King County. Based on the information that you provided at this briefing, it is our understanding that you are unable to completely define the precise problem until further studies can be completed, and this results in your inability to recommend a precise solution. However, because of the urgency of the situation, it is critical for us to understand everything the Corps is doing to help protect our residents and the timelines moving forward. The District also wants to offer any assistance you need in your efforts to diagnose the damage to the dam.

We understand that your primary focus is preventing a failure of the Howard Hanson Dam. However, as you recognize, there could be significant devastation even in the absence of a dam failure. You indicated at our meeting that a storm similar to the one that occurred in January could cause as much as \$2 billion in damage in the Green River Valley with the capacity restrictions currently in place on the dam. Thousands of people also live and work in the Valley.

An independent study by EcoNorthwest found that a shut-down of the floodplains in King County would result in \$46 million in daily lost economic output, because many of our region's major employers, such as Boeing, Starbucks, and Safeway have major facilities in the Green River Valley. This area is the largest warehouse and distribution hub in the entire Northwest, supplying the region with groceries, food service products, gasoline, medical supplies, and other critical provisions.

The BNSF Railway's International Gateway also runs through the Green River Valley, connecting commerce in the Northwest to the rest of the world. In short, the Green River Valley is the lifeline of the entire region. And the Howard Hanson dam protects that lifeline.

Given the vital importance of the Howard Hanson Dam in protecting not only the valley cities, but the entire economy of the region, it is crucial that we know what the Corps' plans and timelines are for ensuring the dam is returned to its full flood protection capacity as soon as possible. We understand that testing is currently under way, and we would like to receive a timeline of the testing and evaluation.

In addition, you indicated that following the testing, a complete solution is likely to take at least two years. We request that this solution finding process be expedited, and that we be notified when the new, expedited solution schedule is complete. We also request information regarding what interim measures the Corps can take this summer to shore up the flood protection capacity to the dam. We must be able to explain to the residents of King County that the Corps is doing everything possible to ensure that major flooding does not occur on the Green River as a result of the damage at the Howard Hanson Dam.

As we discussed in the meeting today, we need to fully understand:

- ☐ The Corps' plan and timeline for learning the extent of the damage of the dam, including studies being performed, etc.
- ☐ The possible short and long-term fixes for restoring the dam's full protective capacity
- ☐ Once the extent of damage is known, the Corps' plans and timelines for returning the dam to its full protective capacity
- ☐ The Corps' plan for protecting the Green River Valley from flooding while the dam repairs are under way
- ☐ The Corps' plan for protecting the County's levees and other flood protection infrastructure from damage that may result from the impaired capacity of the dam
- ☐ The Corps' estimate of potential damage that could result from the impairment of the dam and the likelihood of such damage
- ☐ The Corps' plan for emergency response efforts in the event of flooding on the Green River
- ☐ The Corps' protocols for releasing water from the dam
- ☐ Anything that the County or the Flood Control Zone District can do, within our purview as local governments, to support the Corps' efforts.

We appreciated the cooperation and assistance from the Corps on numerous projects last year, the first year of the District's operations. The projects that were completed on the Green River significantly enhance the flood protection for our residents and businesses. However, the levees on the Green River can only supplement the protection provided by the Howard Hanson Dam, which is the reason that we are extremely concerned to learn that the dam's flood protection capacity is now impaired.

Public safety has always been of paramount importance to King County officials. The County has earned and maintained the highest FEMA CRS rating for flood protection of any county in the country. In addition, the Washington State Department of Ecology called the 2006 King County Flood Hazard Management Plan a "model" for all such plans.

Despite our longstanding leadership on flood protection, following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, we were determined to do even more to help prevent a similar disaster in our region. In 2007, the King County Council and the King County Executive took the extraordinary step of forming a separate government entity with taxing authority to implement flood protection projects throughout King County. The King County Flood Control District now levies approximately \$32 million per year to supplement State and Federal flood protection funding.

We realize that as local governments the capacity of the County and the Flood Control District to address this problem is limited. The Howard Hanson dam is owned, operated and maintained exclusively by the U.S. Army

Corps of Engineers. However, we also want to do everything we can to ensure the safety of our citizens and the protection of our regional economy.

In response to the damage at the Howard Hanson dam, we are already coordinating emergency response operations with the cities in the Green River Valley and will increase staffing at our flood warning center in the event of potential flood conditions. We will also be opening our flood warning center earlier than usual and are implementing a new state-of-the-art automated emergency notification system.

However, these response measures, as important as they are in the event of an emergency, are no substitute for preventing a catastrophe in the first instance. Given the urgency of the situation, we need to understand and to be able to communicate to our residents the full extent of the work that the Corps is undertaking with respect to the repairs and the timeline for doing so.

Thank you for your work on this critical issue. We appreciated your time today and look forward to receiving the additional information that we have requested as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Julia Patterson  
Chair  
Flood Control District Board of Supervisors

Reagan Dunn  
Chair  
Flood Control District Executive Committee