

Foreword

This Characterization Report was developed during an exciting time period for studying and understanding urban creeks, including Thornton Creek. Begun in 1997, the Report has gone through several versions and experienced delays between drafts as its writers—Thornton Creek Watershed Management Committee participants and staff of Seattle Public Utilities—have tried to “catch up” with the results and implications of changes in regulations, new studies, and a citizens’ challenge to proposed private development on a Thornton Creek watershed property in the courts. This dynamic situation challenged the Thornton Creek Watershed Management Committee to identify and grapple with many intertwined issues affecting the Thornton Creek watershed in order to try to understand the myriad needed components for strategies to significantly reduce non-point pollution in the watershed. Consequently, this Report has multiple facets and much new information. At this point, many of the pieces that go into understanding the puzzle of Thornton Creek and its watershed remain under study; analysis that would clearly articulate a complete scientifically-based characterization of the watershed is still in the future.

Significant milestones affecting the Thornton Creek watershed that have occurred during the preparation of this Characterization Report include:

- ◆ New studies conducted by Seattle Public Utilities beginning in 1998 with a number of consulting firms are revising our understanding of both the hydrology and biological viability of Thornton Creek. Information is reported in this Characterization Report from these studies; however, thorough evaluation and understanding of this information is not complete. Additional studies are planned and/or in progress.
- ◆ Listing of the Puget Sound chinook (salmon) populations as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act by the National Marine Fisheries Service on March 16, 1999 opened an array of questions about strategic improvement of local fish habitat that have yet to be answered definitively.
- ◆ Seattle’s City Council adopted new drainage policies in December 1999. These new policies outline a much larger role for Seattle Public Utilities in terms of stormwater management than in the past, and recommend development of new programs and adaptive management of projects over time.
- ◆ During 1999, the City of Seattle was required to adopt additional stormwater control regulations as a condition of the City’s current National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit for its stormwater system. The Seattle City Council adopted a new Stormwater, Grading and Drainage Control Code in June, 2000. Many of the amended provisions of the Stormwater, Grading and Drainage Control Code are being implemented through Director’s Rules that contain more detailed requirements specifying the methods to be used to comply with the Code. These new rules will replace most of the current drainage control Director’s Rules and will be administered jointly by the Department of Design, Construction and Land Use and Seattle Public Utilities. Director’s Rules on the Construction Stormwater Control Technical Requirements Manual and the Source Control Technical Requirements Manual went into effect on July 5, 2000. Director’s Rules on the Flow Control Technical Requirements Manual and Stormwater Treatment Technical Requirements are in draft form and will be completed by the end of 2000.
- ◆ A number of projects to improve habitat, reduce flooding, and settle sediments along Seattle’s urban creeks have been undertaken during the past few years. Monitoring of these projects is being conducted, operations and maintenance manuals being developed for the long term care of SPU projects, and much is being learned about whether or not the

projects being conducted are effective. It is too soon to know what is, or is not, most effective.

- ◆ Citizens have challenged the City of Seattle land use decisions related to a general development plan proposal by the owners of the Northgate Shopping Center in the courts. It is too soon to know the outcomes of these challenges and their implications for riparian areas along tributaries to Thornton Creek.

We hope you will read this Report as a stimulus for continuing research and analysis, policy development, program implementation, and evaluation over the next 10 years rather than relying upon it as a "finished view" of the Thornton Creek watershed.

Chris Woelfel and Cary Westerbeck
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