ELOIKA LAKE PROPERTY OWNER OUTREACH REPORT

Spokane County, Washington

Prepared for:

SPOKANE COUNTY DIVISION OF UTILITIES
PUBLIC WORKS BUILDING
1026 W. BROADWAY AVE.
SPOKANE WA 99260

Prepared by:
1120 Cedar Street
Missoula, MT 59802

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes results from a public outreach program at Eloika Lake to evaluate property owner interest in a lake level stabilization and wetland restoration project. The idea of a lake rehabilitation project has been discussed and extensively studied since the lake outlet was excavated in the 1950s. A recent report determined that lake level and wetland restoration is still feasible and remains a viable option. That report, *Eloika Lake In-Depth Surface Water Storage and Wetland Restoration Feasibility Study - Final Report, June 2009,* can be viewed at: http://www.spokanecounty.org/WQMP/content.aspx?c=1871. With the exception of current uncontrolled snowmelt during spring runoff, the proposed project would not raise lake levels at Eloika Lake but would seek to stabilize the lake level and store water longer after runoff to maintain a desired maximum summer pool level for as long as several months instead of several weeks as is the situation now. Figure 1 represents the West Brach Little Spokane River watershed area that drains to Eloika Lake.

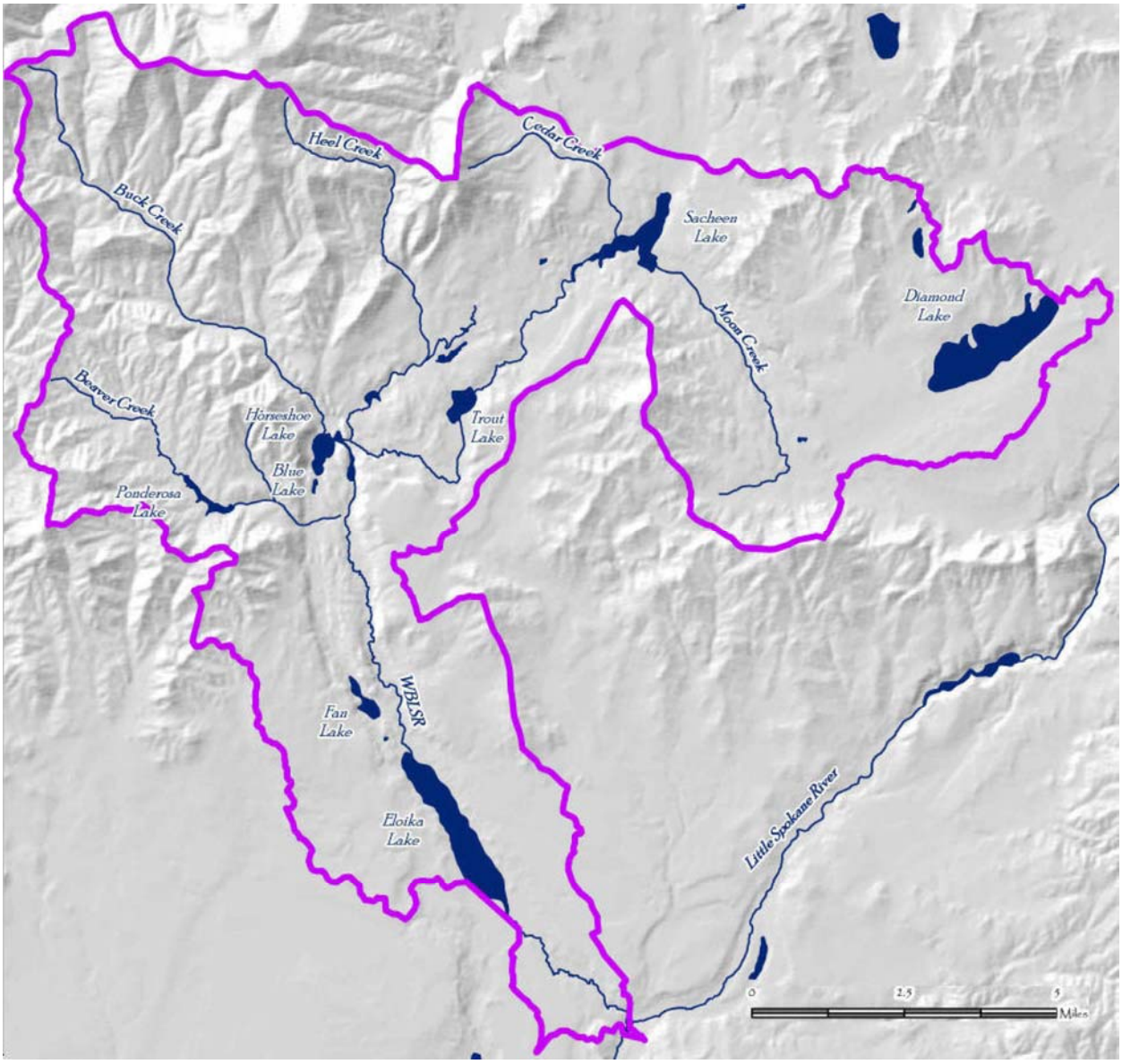

Figure 1: West Branch Little Spokane River Watershed Map

METHODS

First, private meetings were held between PBS&J staff and six landowners who would be most affected by the project. Most of these landowners own property at southern, outlet end of Eloika Lake (Figure 2). At these meetings, PBS&J staff explained the lake stabilization and wetland restoration components of the potential project. Landowner interest and concerns were discussed and information was provided each landowner concerning the project and potential funding sources. Potential solutions to each landowner concern were discussed to demonstrate that there may be opportunities to address these concerns during a final restoration design.

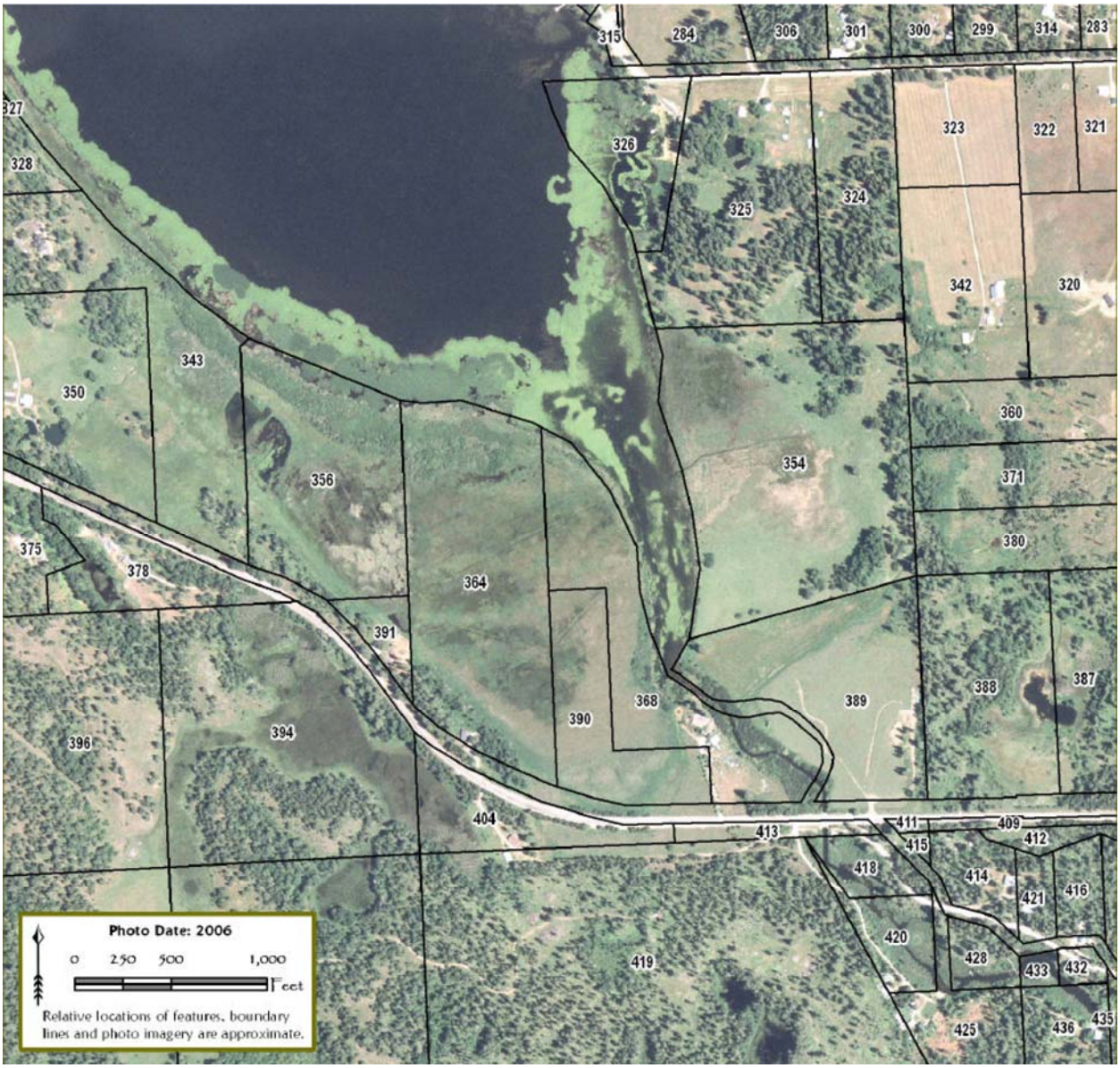

Figure 2: Property parcels around southern portion of Eloika Lake

Secondly, an evening public meeting was also held after meeting notices were mailed to 98 lakeshore property owners. The public meeting included a welcome by the Eloika Lake Association, self-introductions and comments, a presentation about the project by PBS&J and a question/comment period. Additional comments were gathered from individuals following the public meeting.

RESULTS – LANDOWNER MEETINGS

Private landowner meetings were held at each of five properties that would be most affected by the proposed project. Two additional 'most affected' landowners did attend and discussed the project with PBS&J personnel after the public meeting. A brief summary of landowner comments and concerns are provided below.

Landowner 1 (West of lake outlet)
This landowner expressed initial opposition to any project that would detain water on his property for a longer period, especially the portion near his home. He currently has very little high ground (non-wetland) on his property. He seemed most concerned about a depression adjacent to his home that fills with water each year for a short period. He is concerned that if water persisted in this depression into summer months it would increase his mosquito problem. PBS&J staff suggested that potential solutions to this problem include standard mosquito control methods during summer months. Another potential solution may be to fill this small area as part of the larger restoration project. Such filling would not likely be permitted unless it were included as part of an overall wetland rehabilitation and stabilization project that shows significant enhancement of wetland values across the entire area. This landowner is also concerned about his future ability to use the wetland portion of his property for such activities as hiking and mountain biking. PBS&J staff suggested that a restoration project may be able to convert his existing, relatively uniform topography to a more complex topography that includes slightly raised paths for walking or biking. Most of the existing property now supports only cattails and a variety of short plants. This could be converted to a more diverse wetland with trees such as cottonwood and aspen, shrubs such as dogwood, hawthorn and a variety of willows plus many other wetland species such as bulrush, sedges and rushes. There is actually an old levee on this property that is slightly elevated and supports a variety of riparian and wetland shrubs. At the end of our discussion this landowner seemed to change from distinct opposition to a willingness to continue discussions if invited to play a role in determining the final appearance of his property and his ability to use it.

Landowner 2 (Northeast of lake outlet)
This landowner seemed to simply want information about how the project would affect their property and access to the lake. They were concerned that the project would flood additional areas but were informed that the lake level would not rise but the high water level would be maintained for a longer period into the summer. The topography of this site is such that not a lot of change in lake access may be expected. The deeper water at their dock may be a benefit for access as well as for reducing weed growth. This landowner seemed to be in favor of the proposed project.

Landowner 3 (Northeast of lake outlet)
This landowner expressed concern about how the project would affect the wetland and adjacent upland enhancement that is underway on this property. She recently planted a variety of wetland, riparian and upland plants including trees and shrubs. PBS&J personnel complimented the existing effort and suggested that additional plantings, combined with minor topographic adjustments, could increase the appearance and wildlife habitat values of the property. The recent upland plantings should not be affected due to planting above the current high water level. The proposed project would not increase the lake level but merely hold it at a desired maximum level longer. This landowner seemed to generally be in favor of the proposed project.

Landowner 4 (West of lake outlet)
This landowner has made significant improvements to his property including fencing streams, developing ponds and planting new vegetation. He also has a significant bat population which helps with mosquito control. As with most of the other landowners, he didn't want to simply be told what to do with his

property but would like to play an active role in a final restoration design. He seemed overall to be in favor of the project.

Landowner 5 (West of lake outlet)
This landowner has expressed opposition to the project in the past. He would like to fill a portion of his property for another home site. PBS&J staff carefully explained that such filling of a wetland would violate a number of local, state and federal laws and would never be permitted. He seemed to have already obtained the information elsewhere. He harvests hay on a portion of the property and is also concerned with the loss of this resource. PBS&J personnel suggested that the conversion of cropland to wetland is such a common occurrence that there is an established federal program to compensate landowners for this conversion. We discussed a variety of wetland restoration options to change his relatively flat field with few plant species (grasses, sedges and rushes) to a more diverse wetland with topographic and vegetation variations. He seemed open to a project if it would compensate him for production losses, enhance the values he is interested in and respect his ownership. This landowner currently is displaying a FOR SALE sign at the property and is interested in selling a portion or all of it.

Landowner 6 (Northwest of lake outlet)
This landowner was not available for an individual interview or site visit but spoke with PBS&J personnel after the public meeting. Her concern is that she has very little lake frontage that is not currently inundated during the spring high water period. When at high water, her property suffers damage from erosion which threatens further shoreline destabilization. Despite these concerns, she seemed to generally support the project. PBS&J personnel described a variety of options available for addressing her erosion/stability issue but indicated that a solution would need to start with a site visit. Her concerns would need to be addressed in the overall project plan.

Landowner 7 (West of lake outlet)
This landowner was also not available for an individual interview or site visit but is one of the larger property owners on the south (E or W?) shore (proximity to outlet?). He attended the public meeting and seemed very skeptical if not outright against the project. He asked many questions about specifics of the proposed project and ways it might limit his property use or ways it might benefit him. He stayed and further discussed the project with PBS&J personnel after the meeting. The next day PBS&J received the following voicemail from this landowner:

"Hello, this is ....…..., your heckler from the meeting last night. I just wanted to say that what you said finally sunk in and I am turned around 180 degrees and am in favor of the project. Please tell President Greg that I am now in favor…."

Landowner Comment Summary
Each landowner who initially expressed opposition or serious concern about the project seemed to do so due to not wanting to be told what to do on their private land, as opposed to being invited to participate in a cooperative effort which benefits them. All seemed to be under the impression that they would be told what to do and would be required to pay for any enhancements to their property. None of them seemed aware of the potential for enhancing wetlands on their properties in a manner that would increase the appearance, wildlife values, recreational values and appraisal value. Prior to these meetings, many thought the project would potentially decrease their property values. This is likely the first time someone with knowledge of wetland design was available to them to even briefly explore options for wetland enhancements that consider the unique character of their property and their own goals. Not every goal of each landowner can be accommodated so there is a need for future discussion and compromise.

If this project proceeds further, it is important that landowners explore with wetland designers various options for property enhancements sufficient to meet each individual property owner requirement. These

individual restoration plans can then be combined into an overall effort for consideration in final permitting. It is likely that there will need to be compromise among all participants to achieve a project that fulfills both project and landowner goals. These landowner discussions suggest that none are completely against the project but that some will need to see clear benefits to ensure their support.

RESULTS – PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting was held at the headquarters office of Fire District # 4 in Chattaroy at 7 p.m. on June 8, 2010. Meeting notices were mailed to 98 lakeshore property owners and approximately 30 attended. The public meeting included a presentation by PBS&J which reviewed project history, project effects, project benefits and past implementation attempts. A variety of potential wetland enhancements related to the project were identified along with potential funding sources. Among the benefits available are:

- Supportive of numerous federal, state and local watershed enhancement objectives
- Return of former wetland areas to wetland function
- Increased upstream water storage for release more slowly to the Little Spokane River
- Provide additional water depth to lessen excessive vegetation growth and deposition
- Improved water quality – buffer for lake
- Improved wildlife habitat
- Increased recreation opportunities
- Provide economic incentives for landowners converting agricultural uses to wetlands
- Provide economic incentives for wetland conservation easements
- Satisfaction of improving the environment for everyone

Questions and comments were taken throughout the presentation and at the end of the meeting. Several participants stayed for additional discussions with PBS&J personnel. The general attitude of public meeting participants was very positive. Most landowners seemed to understand that the project was a benefit to the watershed and lake as a whole as well as to them individually. Many individuals at the meeting made encouraging comments to the group as a whole and in separate discussions with PBS&J personnel.

RESULTS – FUTURE ACTIONS

The PBS&J report mentioned above, ***"****Eloika Lake In-Depth Surface Water Storage and Wetland Restoration Feasibility Study - Final Report, June 2009,"* provides several concept plans and lists a variety of steps to proceed with a project at Eloika lake. These steps are a general list of technical tasks needed to provide additional data for answering final design and permitting questions. The discussion below relates more to the overall process of implementing the project. Tasks to move forward in this regard include:

- Confirm Public Interest In Proceeding with a Project
- Confirm a Desired Most Beneficial Lake Level and Structure Design
- Identify Wetland Restoration Projects on Lakeshore Properties
- Secure funding for the Control Structure
- Secure funding for the Wetland Restoration
- Implement the Project

Eloika Lake landowners interested in proceeding with this project need to initiate and support a final push to make it happen. The first step is to fund a preliminary effort to obtain financing for the main project which would include both lake level stabilization and wetland restoration. This preliminary funding could come from a variety of sources such as individual donations, property owners, the lake association, local agencies and/or small grants. However, this kind of effort usually requires a more stable and long-

term structure than volunteer-only efforts can usually manage. It may be time to consider forming a tax entity such as a Lake Management and Rehabilitation District or a Water and Sewer District. Such an entity would have the financial security and longevity needed to complete a complex, multi-year project. It would also help to provide an atmosphere of shared interests and promote equality of participation among landowners. The project may be funded by a single large source, but it is just as likely that it would be funded by a combination of sources. These multiple-funding opportunities would require application, coordination and administration which may be best accomplished by an organization with some longevity and staff.

Interest in the project and support for a lake management district might be generated in future meetings and by activities such as, for example, a "1907.8 foot lake level day" or "high water mark day." [*] For such events, one location could be surveyed to identify the 1907.8 foot level and then notice sent out by mail or email on the date this level is reached. The level could also be identified at a local public access site so lakeshore owners could monitor it themselves for comparison with their own property. A simple staff gauge could be installed with 1907.8 identified.
[*] Note: No decision on the most beneficial lake level has been made.

An important first step in the process is to revisit the existing NRCS design of the proposed control structure. That earlier design may need modification based on environmental review comments and more recent discussions. It is possible that a different location or alternative design may be more effective, easier to manage and/or less expensive. NRCS participation in the project should be rejuvenated since they could potentially play an important role in moving forward with final design and funding for the control structure. NRCS also has a wetland program which targets conversion of agricultural land into permanent wetland as well as experience in working with landowners on these issues.

At some point, a major revenue source will be needed to fund the lake level control structure and wetland restoration. Eloika lakeshore property owners will need to continue or expand collaborative relationships with the NRCS, WRIA 55/57 Watershed Implementation Team, Conservation District, regulatory agencies and others to provide the diverse economic and political support this project will require for successful completion.

In summation, the project remains feasible, appears to be consistent with federal, state and local water policy objectives and the WRIA 55/57 and West Branch Watershed Implementation Plans, and may provide multiple benefits, both within the lake and further downstream along the Little Spokane River to its confluence with the Spokane River.