

STAKERHOLDER INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interview Process:

Interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length and conducted via telephone. They were scheduled and conducted by EnviroIssues. Interview candidates were suggested by Forum members, city staff, and interested parties. See Appendix A for discussion questions.

Interview Purpose:

- To determine agency, jurisdiction and key stakeholder expectations of the Forum and the Action Plan.
- To determine agency, jurisdiction and key stakeholder concerns about the Lake Ballinger/McAleeer Creek Watershed Strategic Action planning process.
- To determine specific issues that should be addressed in the Lake Ballinger/McAleeer Creek Watershed Strategic Action Plan.
- To understand what is needed for developing support for the Action Plan and for moving the process forward after the Action Plan is complete.

Key findings:

Most interviewees were well aware of the difficulty of finding a solution to the flooding. A comprehensive solution that addresses: upstream and downstream, flooding and water quality, human uses of the lake, and habitat issues with McAleeer Creek was frequently mentioned. While a few respondents wanted to see action right away, most were more concerned with developing a thoughtful action strategy that would be implemented over time and would balance and address the multiple issues presented above. Several people were concerned that there is not very broad-spread knowledge of and involvement in the watershed study and action planning process.

Specific discussion topics:

Awareness of issues with the Lake Ballinger/McAleeer Creek Watershed:

All of the interviewees were generally aware of issues associated with flooding and water quality in the watershed.

One resident was surprised at the extent of the watershed and how many jurisdictions were included in the watershed.

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Concerns with the watershed:

Flooding

- Lake Ballinger flooding
- Downstream flooding (Lake Forest Park area)
- Potential for flooding at Echo Lake
- Outflow from Lake Ballinger supposed to be limited to 60 cfs; frequently exceeds 100 cfs, compounding problems downstream
- Inability of the watershed to dampen flows – peaks are very sharp and severe
- 18” of water in my lawn
- Lot of low-lying areas along McAleer Creek and lots of opportunities for creek to jump its banks

Water Quality

- Water quality in lakes
- Lake Ballinger is an important urban lake with lots of stormwater and water quality issues
- Freeway run-off impacting water quality of Echo Lake
- Unhappy the hypolimnetic system has been shut off - will further degrade lake's water quality
- Degradation of the water quality and streambed quality of McAleer Creek
- Maintain ability to swim in Lake Ballinger

Land Use

- Land use and development impacts to the watershed over the last 50 years
- Concern with how much impervious surface is around the lake, leading to more flooding
- Weir hasn't been operating well since 1993 – it's not operating to the legal limits
- Maintain ability to swim in Lake Ballinger (lake access)
- We're over built – everyone needs to step up and take responsibility

Environmental Impacts

- Doing something somewhere in the watershed may have negative impacts elsewhere in the watershed
- Concerned about what excess phosphorous might do – algal blooms
- Tired of people dumping into the lake
- Large volume flows on McAleer Creek
 - Impacts to salmon habitat
 - Property damage downstream
 - Siltation
 - Scouring

Lake Ballinger Watershed Strategic Action Plan

- Lack of oxygen in water as it leaves the lake
- Consider Solar Bee oxygen generators for clearing up the lake
- Concerned owners around the lake want to lower the water level – concerned with shrinking the lake and subsequent loss of habitat

Maintenance/Construction Issues

- Issues of liability with upsizing culverts
- Getting water through and over to the other side of the freeway
- Need to control water coming in from Lynnwood and Edmonds
- Way the watershed functions
- Need Low Impact Development (LID) strategies everywhere in the watershed – better natural drainage strategies

Goals for participating in the process:

Information Sharing

- Gain information to share with neighbors
- Get an understanding of how the watershed is currently working and then work on how to solve the problems
- Increase awareness of and implementation of LID practices in design work in the watershed

Community Involvement in Decision Making Process

- Want to be willing and cooperative partners and assist in whatever comes out of this plan
- Serve as a stakeholder and represent my agency's issues
- Part of our responsibility as citizens of Mount Lake Terrace

Comprehensive Solution

- Want solution to not be strictly “let’s put more water downstream or put in a bypass” – seeking a more holistic way to limit water into Lake Ballinger over time
- Don’t want a strictly engineered solution
- Want an action plan that addresses all the problems
- Want an action plan that works and makes sense
- Try and help stop the flooding and get something done properly
- Solve the problems of high creek flows in Lake Forest Park and solve the flooding problems of Lake Ballinger and Hall Lake without having ecological functions downstream impacted
- Improvements downstream should be in balance with what happens upstream

Water Control

- Seek greater control over the water coming out of Lake Ballinger in order to calm flows going into creeks

Water Quality

- Improve quality of water coming out of Lake Ballinger

Needed to support plan:

Reduce Flooding

- Agreement and improvement that would limit the flow out of Lake Ballinger to earlier flow levels – or at least a vision of how to implement that
- Fix Lyon Creek flooding into McAleer Creek

Improve Water Quality

- A plan to do things in and around Lake Ballinger to address water quality
- A comprehensive plan that considers water quality along with flooding

Preservation of Lake and Habitat

- Don't want the lake sacrificed – want it to be a living lake that our kids can enjoy

Acknowledge Landowner Concerns

- Our downstream views and issues are being considered and respected, but need to continue to be respected in proposed solutions
- Any redevelopment retrofitting (LID) needs to be done intelligently as it would be very expensive and disruptive and might not pay off that much
- Won't know until we see what's actually in the plan

Community Outreach

- Develop an awareness of the issues and the stakes in solving this problem, as well as broader awareness of how to protect the watershed
- Study needs to be robust. Action plan recommendations need to be things that solve problems and create good will by creating a good structure that binds things up and makes certain people stay engaged
- Need to keep people at the table. If we keep attentions focused, get media attention, and maintain excitement about the process people will want to stay at the table.

Public Trust & Forum Responsibilities

- Don't need much – trust the process
- An understanding and agreement of what each city's role and responsibility is in the watershed

Lake Ballinger Watershed Strategic Action Plan

- An acceptance of the responsibility for participation in the total solution by all jurisdictions, even if it addresses issues not present in all jurisdictions

Long Term Solution Starting Now

- Longevity – would like to see the Forum cooperation continue over the long term, not just to develop the plan
- Longer term – figure out how to manage water coming into Lake Ballinger
- 100% behind the planning process now
- Tired of more studies – need action now

Hopes for outcomes:

Reduce Flooding

- Better management of the lake level to anticipate rainy season and serve as water repository

Improve Water Quality and Habitat

- Dampen stormwater peak and improve stormwater quality
- Would like to see water quality considered along with flooding
- If fish habitat from Lake Washington up to Lake Ballinger were feasible, would like to enhance that

Information Sharing and Community Outreach

- Do education and outreach to all watershed residents regarding practices to reduce phosphorous (i.e. managing pet waste, lawn fertilizer use, natural yardscapes, etc.)
- Get more and broader attention paid to the watershed
- Ensure that the community and individuals are aware that this is an issue they can participate in – what they do personally can have an impact, good or bad
- Have to educate people not to dump things down their storm drains
- Public education

Accountability & Financing

- Everyone does their fair share
- A willingness on the part of all participating jurisdictions to support the plan with money
- Get more money from the state for this issue
- Get the politics figured out
- Would like to see longevity of the participating jurisdictions' group (Forum) over time

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Consider Alternatives and Implement Best Solution

- Arrive at a consensus that is amenable to folks upstream and downstream that will address all the problems
- Team looks at state-of-the-art solutions, not just the way things have always been done
- Buy out properties on lake and turn into more public access
- Reasonable plan with short, medium and long term objectives

Concerns about participating in this project:

Potential Impacts to Landowners (Upstream & Downstream)

- Concern that the proposed solutions will impact us in a negative way
- If a new discharge line is proposed, where will the water go? Will that have an impact on us
- Ensure thorough investigation of how the Lake Ballinger solution will impact McAleer Creek and downstream
- Would like to see more study/modeling of oxygen levels getting to McAleer Creek after I-5; if improved; we could live with that
- People around lakes more concerned with what runs into the lake – don't pay much attention to where water from their lake goes and the effect it has downstream
- Perception of impacts to Lake Ballinger in relation to impact to downstream residents

Negative Impact on Habitat

- Concerned there will be a lot of political support to enlarge culverts and take out weirs – would harm fish habitat downstream

Water Quality

- If bypass is considered need to see modeling of what would happen to water quality at the end of the bypass

Finding the Best Solution

- Need to look not only at “engineered” solutions, but at all the options that could improve the situation. Pay equal attention to other solutions.
- Don't rush to judgment on solutions. Recognize that have to have a plan to get funding, but shouldn't have an ineffective plan
- Need to, if necessary, buy out people whose structures are directly in the way or help them to flood-proof with FEMA funding before we look at sending floodwater downstream
- Ensure the solution is correct from a science-based standpoint
- There should be a serious effort to buy out those properties on the lake getting flooded; however that doesn't solve the longer term problems

Community Outreach & Input

- Influence upstream and around the lake is much greater than us who are downstream; our positions likely won't be respected
- Need help getting the word out to as many people as possible
- We are trying to maintain things as they have always been, but it's hard
- Not enough people know about the Forum and the process

Cost

- Returning the watershed to its historic natural functioning would be a slow and very expensive process
- Funding – public buy-in to the issue
- Political cooperation – whose responsibility is it? How does funding get applied?
- Part of the success will be our ability to continue to get county, state and federal funding – if we are able to show a robust public process, it will help

Difficult issues to discuss/resolve:

Upstream vs. Downstream Homeowner Concerns

- Conflicts between upstream and downstream residents
- Stakeholder views may be very narrow
- Waterfront homeowners need to be flexible about solutions and what they do on their properties
- What levels of outflow from the lake will balance the concerns of residents around the lake and water flow effects to habitat downstream and downstream flooding?
- To what extent are the interests of upstream, lake and downstream reconcilable in order to come up with a plan that makes people feel “whole” again

Comprehensive Solution

- No simple solution – no low cost solution – no solution that will make everyone happy
- Finding a happy medium is going to be difficult
- Finding a balanced solution rather than one that helps some but hurts others
- Getting from concept to reality

Cost

- Funding once the strategies are in place
- Resources – money. Are there tools available to the state or WRIAs that could help speed up the process or help if they were available to cities?

Lake Ballinger Watershed Strategic Action Plan

- Problem isn't water quality or engineering – the problem is a political problem. Political will needs to be present to make choices and fund and implement solutions.

Responsibility & Tangible Benefits

- Making sure each jurisdiction sees a payback for their participation
- Each participating jurisdiction will have to accept responsibility for participating in the total solution; even if it addresses issues not present in their jurisdiction. The rub will come with cities trying to decide the responsibilities they have within and without their borders
- Interests of big players - they have to be flexible, recognize their contribution to the water quality problem and participate in providing solutions
- Study needs to not place explicit blame or assign levels of responsibility
- Maintaining momentum over time

Information Sharing & Community Outreach

- Lake level- is the court mandated lake level based on science?

Process Details:

Communication and Public Outreach

- Forum members – doesn't seem like there's enough communications between the cities.
- Need to improve communications to public and between staff
- Very happy with information so far
- Send out minutes of Forum meetings via the email list

Suggestions of others to talk with:

- Streamkeepers
- Lake Forest Park Environmental Quality Commission
- Lake Forest Park Stewardship Foundation {added}
- Resident along McAleer Creek
- Golf courses {already included}

Stakeholder Interests Interviewed:

- Lake Ballinger/McAleer Creek Watershed Forum council members
- City water resources staff
- Community stakeholders
- Environmental stewardship organization stakeholders
- Washington State Department of Ecology
- Washington State Department of Transportation

Appendix A

Discussion Questions Used to Guide the Interviews:

1. Interview Purpose

- a. Describe the purpose of the interview and how input will be used.

2. General Information

- a. How aware are you about the issues with the Lake Ballinger/ McAleer watershed?
- b. What concerns do you have with the Lake Ballinger/ McAleer watershed?

3. Goals

- a. What are your goals for participating in this process?
- b. At the end of the process, what would make your participation in this process worthwhile?
- c. What is it going to take for you to support the Strategic Action Plan?
- d. What outcomes do you expect from this process?

4. Concerns

- a. What concerns do you have about participating in this process?
- b. What issues do you think will be the most difficult to discuss / resolve in this process?
- c. Which issues do you think are likely to interfere with the project's success?

5. Process

- a. How do you like to receive information before a meeting? Mail, email, other?
- b. (To forum members) How much time do you need to review information materials before a meeting?
- c. (To forum members) What information do you think project staff needs to provide to inform the Forum's discussions?
- d. Are there any key stakeholders that should be included in this process?
- e. Is there anyone else that I should be talking to?