SKAGIT WATERSHED COUNCIL
A Community Partnership for Salmon

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Upper Skagit Indian Tribe
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
WA State Dept. of Ecology
Washington Water Trust
Western WA Agricultural Association
Wildcat Steelhead Club
Wild Steelhead Coalition
WSU Skagit County Extension

Geoff Baran, Spills Coastal Protection Fund Grant Program Coordinator
Spill Prevention, Preparedness, and Response Program
Washington Department of Ecology
P.O. Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

February 16, 2021

RE: South Fork Project Proposal

Dear Mr. Baran,

The Skagit Watershed Council is pleased to support the proposal by Skagit County Public Works to create off-channel habitat within the South Fork of the Skagit River tidal delta area. The Council is a non-profit organization dedicated to understanding, protecting, and restoring habitat that supports sustainable fisheries. Our 45 member organizations support collaborative efforts focused on strategically reducing habitat limiting factors for salmon and trout in WRIAs 3 and 4.

The Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan identifies tidal delta habitat, like at South Fork, as a limiting factor to Chinook recovery in the Skagit watershed. More than 70% of tidal delta channels and wetlands have been diked and converted to farmland and other uses since the early 1900's. When delta habitats are filled to capacity smolts are forced out into nearshore waters, where their survival rate is lower. While this project does not return farmland to delta, it does make best use of the resources we have to produce the most returning Chinook salmon possible in the immediate term. Similar projects creating tidal delta habitat behind the dikes have been occupied by Chinook smolts as soon as they were made accessible, increasing the overall habitat capacity of the Skagit estuary. The Skagit system produces 50% of the Chinook salmon in Puget Sound. Focusing resources on projects in this watershed promises to have the highest potential impact on the Puget Sound Chinook population. Increasing the amount, quality, and access to this key habitat will benefit Chinook salmon and the threatened Southern Resident Killer Whales who rely on them for prey.

We thank you for your consideration of this proposal to provide funds so that this project may be completed.

Sincerely,

Richard Brocksmith

Richard Brocksmith, Executive Director

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