It takes a village to sustain a village

Snow joke: I’m ready for spring. Fortunately, its right around the corner. Irrespective of what some groundhog in Pennsylvania might say, the lilac and quince bushes outside my window and the yellowing goldfinches at the bird feeder say spring is on its way. Yep. Despite the white stuff that’s been dumping on us lately, we are about to turn the page on another winter and begin, again, another spring. And for us that means—oh, right—more rain. While it often seems we are—how should I say it?—blessed with an abundance of water, ensuring that water remains clean and available for all our needs takes a lot of effort. In this issue, let’s look at some of the local agencies working to protect our bountiful water resources for the benefit of people, salmon, goldfinches and all that share this village of Kitsap.

Snow melts. Rain falls. Then what? See the picture on the left? That is stormwater. In many ways, stormwater is a human invention. We build roads, houses, parking lots. Though they make our lives comfortable and our society possible, the roof, the road, the asphalt all come with a downside: they are what are known as “impervious surfaces”. These are surfaces that shed water rather than absorb and infiltrate it. The more our county grows, the more impervious surface we install on the landscape. All of this impervious surface poses a threat to our natural water cycle. Stormwater can overwhelm streams and baby salmon. Impervious surfaces can limit the amount of water that recharges our groundwater supplies. Clean Water Kitsap is a group of local agencies that work together to protect and manage Kitsap’s water resources. As illustrated by the picture on the left, this starts with stormwater.

The Clean Water Kitsap (CWK) program is a collaborative partnership led by Kitsap County’s Public Works Stormwater Division. Kitsap County Public Works provides funding to CWK partners to support stormwater related programs and tasks. Partner agencies include: Kitsap Public Health District, Kitsap Conservation District, Washington State University Kitsap Extension and Kitsap Public Utility District. These agencies share expertise and address different areas of stormwater management. In this issue, we will look at some of the activities undertaken by CWK partners. As mentioned, Kitsap County Public Works Stormwater Division serves as the lead entity for the Clean Water Kitsap partnership. This agency is also responsible for designing, constructing and maintaining stormwater infrastructure in unincorporated areas of Kitsap County.

Have you ever seen a sign like the one on the left? Odds are it was put there by Kitsap Public Health District. As part of its work with Clean Water Kitsap, the Health District regularly tests streams, lakes and swimming beaches for water quality. Poor water quality usually means a problem upstream. The Health District—through its Pollution Identification and Correction program—seeks to find and address the source of the pollution. Often times these are failing septic systems. The Health District has information for septic owners on “dos” and “don’ts” of septic ownership and resources to assist those who find their septic system has failed. Learn more at www.kitsappublichealth.org.
Despite our growth, Kitsap remains a fairly rural community. As such, we have lots of “hobby farms”. Though relatively small, these farms can have a big impact on water quality if they are not managed properly. Kitsap Conservation District works with farm and other landowners to implement “best management practices” that help prevent negative impacts to our water resources. These include an Agriculture Assistance Program for livestock owners, a Backyard Habitat Program for those who have a stream on their property and a Rain Garden and Low Impact Development program to assist landowners in designing and installing landscape features that protect water quality. Visit their website at www.kitsapcd.org.

If the Conservation District had a mascot it might be a pig. Or a horse. Or a cow. It definitely wouldn’t be a cougar. That one is taken by another CWK partner, Washington State University’s Kitsap Extension office. As the state’s agriculture school, WSU maintains extension offices throughout the state. These offices assist landowners with environmentally friendly land management practices. These include information on eco-friendly pest management, responsible fertilizer practices and low-impact development options. Additionally, as part of the Clean Water Kitsap Team, WSU Extension provides Stream Stewards training for citizens interested in learning more about Kitsap’s water resources and hosts Salmon Tours when our salmon return. To learn about all the programs offered by WSU Extension Kitsap, visit their website at https://extension.wsu.edu/kitsap. Go Cougs!

I am proud to say that Kitsap PUD is the most recent member of the Clean Water Kitsap group. As you know KPUD maintains a comprehensive network to monitor county rainfall, streamflows and groundwater levels. Data—especially rainfall and streamflow data—help all the previously mentioned agencies with their work. Good data is essential for proper stormwater design and management and it is helpful in investigating and resolving water quality issues. Telemetered data loggers on rain and streamflow monitoring stations help alert stormwater staff to situations that may warrant their attention.

Not listed in the Clean Water Kitsap roster, but perhaps the most important person involved in the effort to protect and preserve Kitsap’s water resources is... YOU! We all have the ability to help or harm the land and water we all share. Choose the former. If you have the time, call WSU Extension and sign up for a class or a Salmon Tour. If you have pigs in a growing wallow, contact the Conservation District and get some help. If your septic is muddying up your yard, call the Health District. And beyond all that, just do the right thing. As they say, we all live downstream.

For more information, visit the Clean Water Kitsap webpage at http://www.cleanwaterkitsap.org