

# River Safety Council

January 21, 2009

## OPEN LETTER REGARDING CONSTRUCTION IN WASHINGTON RIVERS

The many fine rivers and streams in Washington State are heavily used for recreation. The State actively promotes this use. But dangerous construction in many rivers threatens the safety of river users – fishermen, swimmers, boaters and juveniles on inner tubes, the most vulnerable of all.

Construction for fish habitat restoration can and should be done so as not to endanger the public.

***Without providing specific comments on any project, the River Safety Council advises that it considers any project with the following attributes dangerous to river users:***

### ***Hazardous types of construction***

Use of LWD that includes the following features:

- Structures that have openings large enough to entrap hands or feet
- Rootwads and brush in places that the current allows them to function as a sieve or strainer, or close enough to the main current that they snare people and objects
- Wood set adrift by unsecured dumping. It should be placed and anchored where it is desired so it doesn't endanger river users, levees and other construction.

### ***Hazardous locations***

Placement of rough, sharp or porous LWD or other construction material should be specifically excluded from:

- Outside of bends where the river current may push users into structures
- Projects in or immediately adjacent to the main current of straight stretches, or other locations in the current where river users may be swept into the project
- In restricted channels
- In canyons or other areas where egress is difficult or impossible
- Overhanging a stream at a level that would pose a threat to river users swept under it
- Projects that impact a significant portion of the river channel
- Sequential projects where the combined effect exceeds the individual risk

We believe it is not only possible, but relatively straightforward to build projects in rivers that protect banks, provide wood for fish habitat, and ensure public safety. This may entail using rock for the structure and wood for the fish enhancement in another, safer location.

In many or most cases, fish mitigation in rivers can be placed directly across the river from the structures that are being built to prevent or repair damage to levees on the outside bend of a river.

***Safer locations for LWD placement:***

- The inside of river bends where the current is slow
- In eddies and slack water where the current is slow
- Behind large obstacles that deflect the current
- In shallow side channels

***Safer techniques:***

- Shield LWD with deflector rock or smooth wood in front of entangling wood.
- Pull the ends of the rootwads and LWD significantly closer to the bank behind the deflector so tendrils don't snare anyone or anything in the current
- Shiplapped or shingle-lapped wood structures
- Deflector rocks or wood high enough to break the surface of the water to prevent inadvertent public exposure to the project

***What rivers and streams have recreational use? – Virtually all!***

Safe construction techniques should be used on any stream or creek with an appreciable current flow without regard to known use by river users. The extent of river usage can never be fully known. However, often inexperienced youth on inner tubes and other minimal floatation devices are frequent users of our streams throughout the state.

***Monitor regularly and modify existing projects as necessary***

Projects change over time with high water events, and often become more dangerous. Periodic monitoring should be part of any project.

Please see our web site, [www.RiverSafetyCouncil.org](http://www.RiverSafetyCouncil.org), for other information and examples of dangerous projects.

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