

Illegal Bridge work threatens salmon

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By Chantelle Lusebrink

Illegal construction in Lewis Creek on Jan. 24 may have jeopardized fragile kokanee salmon eggs and fry in the stream.

The construction was done at 18448 S.E. 43rd St., where nearby residents were attempting to shore up a private bridge over the creek that provides access to their homes.

Police stopped the work and city code enforcement officials are investigating how the bridge can be worked on, how the work that has been done can be mitigated and what can be done to protect the stream, said Autumn Monahan, city public information officer.

"This is a very serious issue," she said.

A downstream neighbor found the illegal construction. Richard asked that his last name not be published because he didn't want to be confronted by other community members.

He said he heard a lot of noise Jan. 24 and when he looked down at the creek, he noticed a lot of sediment washing down the creek.

"I couldn't see what was going on, because there was a large clump of trees in the way," he said. "When I walked up there, I saw a gigantic backhoe and two large dump trucks dumping boulders into the creek."

He said there appeared to be no sediment control measures for the construction.

The first thought he said he had was for the kokanee salmon, which use the creek to spawn.

The kokanee are a species city officials have requested be put on the endangered list, Monahan said.

"I've participated, in the past, with King County to count the kokanee and I know that they are endangered," Richard said. "What few eggs were left are now probably gone."

He said he asked the neighbors what they were doing, since most work in the creek is usually done in August or September, when it has the least impact on the salmon.

He said the people he talked to were concerned that there may be a structural problem with the bridge.

"I told them that was fine," he said, adding he is not a civil engineer, but the bridge didn't appear to him to be in imminent danger. "But if there is a structural problem with the bridge, they need to do it the right way, a way that doesn't hurt the kokanee or other Lewis Creek fish."

When the neighbors didn't appear to listen to him or stop the work, he said he called the police since it was a Saturday.

When police arrived, the residents had no permits granted or on site for the work, Monahan said.

The case has been forwarded Michele Forkner, the city's code enforcement officer, for review with regard to the city's critical areas ordinance and its clearing and grading codes.

The case is still under review and no citations have been issued.

"Our main goal now is to work with the homeowner to make sure the bridge is properly improved, but we also want to make sure the creek is protected," Monahan said. "Lewis Creek is one of the remaining kokanee spawning beds for Lake Sammamish."

Although this type of incident doesn't happen very often, she said, work without the proper permits or research can have a wide range of effects on the city's salmon bearing creeks. Among those are destruction of fertile salmon beds and loss of habitat.

"Any work that involves the city's waterways, the citizen needs to call the city's Public Works office early," Monahan said. "Before they hire a contractor or design their project, they should know what permits they need from the city, and also with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, at the state level.

"We're here to work with residents to make sure their work is properly mitigated and properly done in the creeks," she added.

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Know the law

Call the city's Public Works Department at 837-3400 to know what permits you might need before beginning your next project. Reach Reporter Chantelle Lusebrink at 392-6434, ext. 241, or clusebrink@isspress.com. Comment on this story at www.issaquahpress.com.