

**From:** [Jerome Thiel](#)  
**To:** [SEPADesk2 \(DFW\)](#)  
**Subject:** Response for Conservation Northwest  
**Date:** Friday, October 21, 2016 1:49:49 PM  
**Attachments:** [Response letter for Conservation Northwest.pdf](#)

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Hi George / Conservation Northwest

This PDF file is in response to the public comments you submitted for the Benson Creek Irrigation Project. In your comment letter, you reference issues outside the scope of our infrastructure repair plans so I'm not able to address those concerns, but feel we are taking careful and well engineered steps for safety and fiscal responsibility.

Thank You

Jerome Thiel

BCIWUA



To: George Wooten  
Conservation Northwest

10/11/2016

From: Jerome Thiel  
Benson Creek Irrigation Water Users Association

Re: DNS 16-060 comments

Dear George

Our irrigation repair program consists of three main projects.

1. Replace approximately 1500' of damaged mainline.
2. Rebuild our diversion pond where surface water is transferred to our gravity pressurized pipe system.
3. Rebuild the eroded Hawkins Dam spillway which we refer to as lake #5.

For roughly the past year we have been having monthly meetings with Okanogan Conservation District, WDFW, Methow Valley Ranger District, Methow Conservancy, CCAN, Okanogan Farm Services Agency, Benson Creek property owners and irrigation association members to identify a recovery plan and how best to fund this plan. We spent months looking into converting to wells, but past DOE well logs and testimony from long time Benson residents showed sufficient water was not available and the expense to install this infrastructure was significantly more than our current repair plan. The Wenner Lakes system was installed expressly for irrigation back in the 1890's and we felt the current gravity pressurized system proved to be the better option for ecology. No wells would need to be drilled, no power consumption for pumps, no power poles, no power lines and no additional drain on an already spotty aquifer that could impact domestic water availability to Benson Valley residents.

Our funding budget is extremely conservative and we are doing everything within our means to keep the repairs safe, environmentally friendly and value added. The BCIWUA funding comes from numerous sources, OCD, FSA, long term recovery individual donations and it's members are committing their own money.

As far as future dam safety. The August 21, 2014 flood occurred immediately after one of the worst fire events in Okanogan history. The entire Benson Creek, Finley Canyon and Yockey Creek drainages were still smoldering when the rain storm hit. Two years later, the soil and vegetation conditions above the lakes are much improved and even with several significant rain events and a substantial spring melt the system demonstrated improvement. It's important to note that the dams themselves suffered no damage. The dams didn't burst or breach. The spillway's failed, but that's how they were designed. With help from the DOE dam safety engineer, we are greatly improving the strength and flow capabilities of the Wenner Lake system.

The Wenner lake / dam irrigation system offers a run-off buffer for storm water and controlled water storage for late season irrigation. Another benefit is that after water is no longer needed for field irrigation, we can draw down the lakes in late fall and send that water down to the Methow River for salmon and steelhead stream flows. This was something discussed at the meetings and has received favorable comments from WDFW. For us having full lakes over winter is no benefit and by lowering them it may reduce the risk with spring melt.

I hope this information is helpful and be assured we have been working diligently for two years to find the best option for all parties. Our group hasn't had irrigation water for those two years and it's been a financial burden on some families.

Jerome Thiel