Judge Orders Clean Water Act Compliance

Local News

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Posted on : December 30, 2011 at 6:18 am

VANCOUVER, Wash. - Salmon - and anything else swimming in waterways around Vancouver - could have a better new year after a court decision this week. On Wednesday, U.S. District Court Judge Ronald Leighton ruled that Clark County has to comply with federal clean water laws, which means doing more to prevent polluted stormwater runoff into creeks and rivers.

The county has faced off with a neighborhood association and environmental groups for several years over the issue. That battle isn't over, but the groups' attorney - Janette Brimmer with *Earthjustice* - says in the meantime, the judge is ordering Clark County to meet the same stormwater permit requirements as other counties.

"We're really talking about the county and developers having to comply with the most minimal standards here. It is not something that is onerous or unusual, relative to the rest of the state, the rest of the region - even nationwide."

The combination of Clark County's fast growth and proximity to the Columbia River has made water quality a challenge, adds Brimmer.

"Water pollution, and particularly water pollution from stormwater runoff, is a really big problem in Clark County. It's having a huge impact, for example, on a lot of Columbia River salmon species that spawn and live in those streams in Clark County."

The county created its own plan for managing stormwater runoff, an alternative that critics have said is weak because it exempts some developments and focuses on cleaning up pollution instead of preventing it. That plan is the subject of a separate court case. - Chris Thomas