

Environmental Education Support Proposal Watershed of 10,000 Stewards

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Prepared for
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and

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Presented to
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April 22, 2004

Background/Orientation

The Johnson Creek Watershed Council's Environmental Education and Outreach Program (EEOP) is accomplished through Board, staff, volunteer, community, educator and student participation. The multi-layered initiative has been created to provide hands-on programs for K-12 students, and other life-long learners, to gain knowledge about the history and ecology of the watershed. The EEOP is based in the creek-side offices of the Johnson Creek Watershed Council but is primarily carried out in other locations throughout the watershed: schools, parks, and core habitat areas. Although our primary audiences are school-age children, life-long learners and the 170,000+ residents throughout the watershed are also engaged through interpretive signage, our Watershed Wide Event, Snap-Shot Monitoring Day, JC 101, and Restoration Work Party days. All elements and services of the EEOP, whether offered through the schools or other venues are provided **free of charge**.

The proposed project, described below, is on going and builds on the foundations established, expands outreach capacity, encourages increased public involvement and provides the means to consistently address public concerns about the creek not only in the Lents area, the site of the Thermo Fluids spill, but along the creek's entire 26 mile run. The basis for this proposal is the Council's Watershed Action Plan and Strategic Plans. The proposed project will enable the JCWC to work more effectively and directly with the impacted communities and especially the Lents neighborhood.

Key Goals of the Project

- ✳ **Expanded effort to inspire and facilitate community awareness and investment by developing and hosting watershed wide events**
- ✳ **Annually monitor, report, and publicize stream health and issue annual status report.**
- ✳ **Increase educational signage along the Springwater Corridor.**
- ✳ **Expand public awareness and education campaign about Johnson Creek and provide a variety of educational opportunities to support and further the campaign.**

Proposed Project: Watershed of 10,000 Stewards – From Assessment to Action

Residents and students of this watershed connect to its natural resources, functions and assets in three ways: 1) through the science of the creek itself - its habitat, hydrology, biology, and flow; 2) through watershed restoration work parties that focus on invasive and debris removal, native species plantings, and long-term design and re-development of key sites to restore function and support fish and wildlife habitat; and, 3) through its stories and sense of place. The proposed project combines the Council's long-term commitment to environmental education and restoration with leadership, key message development and community participation.

Watershed of 10,000 Stewards will focus on increasing student and public participation, actively partnering and honing message development and delivery in order to inspire more informed, long-term and consistent stewardship of Johnson Creek. Projects that will be expanded upon using the funds requested from Thermo Fluids are described below.

✳️*Teachable Moments: Classroom Hands-on and Field Work in the Watershed* – The primary goal of “teachable moments” is to increase awareness and understanding of: what a watershed is and how its natural systems work; the consequences of pollution and human impacts on the watershed; the role of indicator species such as salmonids; the importance of native plants; and practices to protect and enhance the watershed. In 2003-04, JCWC staff engaged over 1500 students from elementary, middle and high schools in an educational program with an additional 2000 community volunteers also participating through other educational events. Because of current funding cutbacks for schools, this program is only possible through the financial support and assistance of organizations like the Johnson Creek Watershed Council. The major obstacle to the JCWC providing on-going future support is lack of future funding to sustain a commitment to full-time professional staff, scientific tools, and transportation. Our goal is to develop a set of core schools (2 elementary, 2 middle, 2 high, 2 alternative and/or multi-age schools) within the Johnson Creek watershed where opportunities for environmental education and stewardship are available free of charge.

✳️*Watershed Wide Event (WWE)* – Annually, the JCWC hosts the WWE at no less than 12 sites. Historically, the Lents area has served as one of the more active work party sites. Throughout the 54 sq. mi. watershed as many as 400 volunteers turn out to remove invasives, plant native species, and mulch previous plantings. Working through our Outreach Coordinator, the JCWC collaborates with many partners including neighborhood associations, schools, local governments, businesses, and regional public interest and civic groups. Tools, tool trailers and outreach materials are all needed to expand this popular event. JCWC will continue to provide the Lents area with an opportunity to connect to the Watershed Wide Event as well as other restoration and planting events throughout the year by working with Lents Springwater Habitat Restoration Project.

✳️*JC 101* – This 2-part, 6 hour course, led by the JCWC Education Coordinator, is designed to increase knowledge about natural resources, fish and wildlife habitats, water quality, riparian habitat conditions and identification of plant species. Part 1 takes place in a classroom setting and includes an historic overview of the watershed, its functions and assets; Part 2 takes place in the field where participants are led by qualified professionals and conduct water quality and riparian habitat investigations, sampling for macroinvertebrates and identification of plant species. Both the cost of transportation, printing of materials, and availability of scientific tools has limited the ability to offer this popular course.

**Springwater Corridor Educational Signage* – This public awareness and education program develops and deploys permanent logo-watershed signage and interpretative signage along the Springwater Corridor. The goal is to raise the awareness and understanding of those that walk, ride and jog the corridor that they are in the Johnson Creek Watershed, and of its history, features, fish and wildlife, plants and water quality. Although the artwork for logo watershed signage is completed, lack of funding for finalizing designs, development and deployment of signage has prevented this program's expansion.

**Annual State of The Watershed Report* – This report features a scientific overview of the state of the health of the Johnson Creek watershed as well as provides a collection of vignettes about the people and their watershed- stories we have already begun to record and collect. The report would present both the tragedy of thoughtless actions along the creek and the power of restorative vision and commitment.

We believe our **Watershed of 10,000 Stewards** project will significantly and strategically build public involvement and support for the JCWC and its work, and measurably improve the community's perception of Thermo Fluids as a neighbor and corporate citizen. We have tied elements of the project directly to our Watershed Action Plan and Strategic Planning goals to focus on how we can deliver an effective EEOP program that is responsive to concerns generated by the Thermo Fluids spill as well as provide lasting benefits well into the future. For every dollar of Environmental Education funding received, the JCWC will leverage at least an additional \$5, making this a highly valuable investment.