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The Upper Thompson Sanitation District regrets to announce that the District will discontinue discharge of treated effluent to the Wapiti Meadows Wetland by the end of December 2010.

The Wapiti Meadows is located north of the District treatment facilities in a flood plain below the Olympus Dam. The Wapiti Meadows is owned by the US Bureau of Reclamation and maintained by the Estes Valley Recreation and Park District (EVRPD). Prior to 1996, the Wapiti Meadows attracted a variety of wildlife, especially birds, when it became an intermittent wetland during spring runoff. The District began discharging a portion of its treated effluent to the Wapiti Meadows in 1996 with support from the Bureau of Reclamation and the EVRPD. The District discharged treated effluent to enhance habitat for fish and wildlife in the Estes Valley by maintaining the meadow with water year round.

The District received approval to discharge 100 gallons per minute of treated effluent to the Wapiti Meadow from the Water Quality Control Division (WQCD) in 1998. The District's permitted effluent limitations for discharge to Wapiti Meadow were established as equivalent as those for discharge to the Big Thompson River.

In 2002 the WQCD determined that the effluent limitations for discharge to the wetland were based on dilution flow in the river and dilution flow did not exist in the wetland. The WQCD determined that the established effluent limitations were inappropriate as the wetland water source consisted of only of treated effluent and intermittent storm water. At that point, the WQCD established interim standards for the wetland that are more restrictive than the standards for discharge to the river. As a result, the District's treated effluent discharged to the wetland was required to comply with the new restrictive standards, and the District would have been required to add additional treatment.

The District was faced with the option to discontinue discharge of treated effluent to the wetland, construct additional treatment to meet the more restrictive discharge limits, or evaluate the ability to implement site-specific standards. During discussion with the WQCD and EPA, it was determined that site specific standards for the wetland may be similar to those in place for discharge to the river and allowed for continued discharge of treated effluent to the wetland. The District then attempted to develop site-specific standards to allow the District to continue discharge of treated effluent to the wetland. The District, with cooperation by the Bureau of Reclamation, the WQCD, and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), began a multi-year biological evaluation of the wetland to assist in the development of site-specific numeric

standards. The ultimate goal of the evaluation was to develop site specific standards to allow continued discharge of treated effluent to the wetland.

The wetland evaluation characterized the Wapiti Meadow Wetland as compared to other naturally occurring pristine wetlands to determine whether the wetland was capable of supporting a diverse avian, vegetative, fish, and aquatic invertebrate community under the current treated effluent water quality. Following a two year evaluation, the collected biological and water quality data was summarized and showed that the wetland water quality and biological diversity was not comparable to a naturally occurring pristine wetland. As a result, the WQCD and EPA would not support site specific standards for continued discharge of treated effluent to the wetland. The District was then faced with the two remaining alternatives for the wetland, including the addition of treatment for continued discharge of treated effluent or shutting down the discharge entirely.

The District has reluctantly decided that shutting down discharge of treated effluent to the wetland is the preferred alternative. Although the District believes that the wetland is a benefit to the community and has attracted wildlife to the area, the District does not believe that the cost associated with additional treatment for the portion of treated effluent discharged to the wetland is justified to the Districts' rate payers at this time. The District has decided to discontinue discharge of treated effluent to the Wapiti Meadows in December 2010.

Please call the District at 586-4544 if you have any questions, or if we may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Chris Bieker  
District Manager