

State Environmental Impact Statement for proposed flood protection project

The [Chehalis Basin Strategy](#) is a collaborative process staffed by the Office of Chehalis Basin and led by the Chehalis Basin Board. This 10-year partnership has engaged scientists, landowners, utility managers, fishers, farmers, and foresters, agency leaders, local elected representatives and community leaders, and leaders from the Chehalis Tribe and Quinault Nation. Together, they are imagining and examining strategies to restore aquatic species **and** protect the region from the predicted increase in flooding disasters.

Today, the Washington Department of Ecology released a draft EIS evaluating the possible and probable environmental impacts of one of the projects under consideration for the Strategy. [This proposed project](#) could work alongside other local and large-scale flood prevention and aquatic species restoration projects, and includes:

- **A flood protection dam and temporary reservoir** near Pe Ell to reduce damages during a major or catastrophic flood. The structure and reservoir would only be used during major or larger storm events, by temporarily holding back floodwater until it is safe to release it back to the river.
- **Fish passage facilities** at the flood protection dam to allow fish to pass both upstream and downstream.
- **Airport levee improvements** to protect the Chehalis-Centralia Airport, local businesses, and area transportation from catastrophic flood damage.

Statements from Chehalis Basin Strategy board members

Tyson Johnston, vice president, Quinault Indian Nation

Guided by best, new and emerging science, the Quinault Nation is committed to giving the dam full and fair consideration. We look forward to learning more from this study about how the dam will affect salmon and our treaty rights while we continue to weigh whether a dam can be part of a comprehensive solution to reduce flood damage and restore habitat throughout the Chehalis Basin.

Harry Pickernell, chairman, Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation

The Chehalis Tribe has engaged for several years in the Chehalis Basin Strategy process with integrity. We remain committed to evaluating all options with respect to fish and habitat enhancement and the potential of addressing flooding issues.

The citizens of the basin must find a cost effective and viable path that will restore the fishery for coming generations and, if appropriate, provide flood damage reduction for families and communities in the basin. A clear example of the latter issue is that the Chehalis Tribe no longer

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allows or builds in the floodplain on the Reservation. Much work remains to be done, and we must move forward with a sense of urgency. The Tribe's and its neighbors' future depends on it.

Michael Garrity, Energy, Water, and Major Projects division manager, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife

The release of this draft EIS is an important step toward a Chehalis Basin strategy that creates more resilience for local communities and the watershed's salmon, steelhead, and other aquatic species.

WDFW is looking forward to using this EIS to help determine the feasibility, scope, and scale of mitigation for the proposed flood retention facility. We also look forward to working with colleagues on the Chehalis Basin Board to identify and recommend a package of actions that provides for both flood resilient communities and habitat restoration benefits that go well above and beyond the impacts of flood damage reduction projects.

Jay Gordon, Chehalis Valley farmer and board member, Chehalis Basin Flood Authority

We have to stay out of the "flood-fight-forget-repeat" cycle. The Chehalis Basin Strategy is our best chance to secure our future before it is taken away from us. This environmental review will inform our evaluation process as we continue working together across the Basin to reverse the decline of salmon, and protect our farms and communities from the predicted increase of flooding disasters.

Vickie Raines, commissioner, Grays Harbor County, and chair, Chehalis Basin Board

The sport and commercial fishing-related businesses of Grays Harbor, Hoquiam, and Aberdeen have suffered, as has the Quinault Nation from salmon decline and sea level rise. We've seen these communities come together to see each other through the lean years. To survive, we need a coordinated effort to meet the accelerated impacts of a changing climate head on. This environmental review will help inform the Chehalis Basin Strategy that is working to meet that challenge.

J. Vander Stoep, governor-appointed member, Chehalis Basin Board

Every Chehalis Basin community, including every town and county, the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, and the Quinault Indian Nation, is participating in the Chehalis Basin process. This process will only move forward if we can create a comprehensive fish and flood plan that benefits every community.

The water retention facility is one potential element of the plan. Two extensive state reviews show that without this measure, thousands more people will be hit by catastrophic flooding. However, building a dam alone harms aquatic species. When combined with mitigation options that will be developed and the continued work on the basinwide Aquatic Species Restoration Plan, I am optimistic that every community will see a net positive.

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Steve Malloch, governor-appointed member, Chehalis Basin Board

Chehalis faces both serious flood risk and declining salmon populations. Major steps toward restoration include the release of the first phase of an ambitious Aquatic Species Restoration Plan along with early implementation projects. On the flood side, household, business and community protection projects are underway.

The dam being considered for inclusion in the flood strategy is technologically advanced and is designed to allow free passage of fish except during flood events. With release of this EIS, the Chehalis Board, engaged Tribes, and community will begin the process of evaluating impacts of the proposed dam and whether it should be a part of the strategy to address flooding.

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