

CHEHALIS BASIN STRATEGY FAQ

DRAFT STATE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Q: WHAT IS THE CHEHALIS BASIN STRATEGY?

The process began shortly after the devastating floods of 2007 and 2009 that shut down parts of I-5 and destroyed property, put communities and public health and safety at risk, cost hundreds of millions of dollars in damages and lost revenue, and overwhelmed fish and wildlife habitat.

Governor Chris Gregoire created the process that is now overseen by the [Chehalis Basin Board](#) to identify ways to protect communities and fish and wildlife from the dual threats of devastating floods and compromised river systems. The process is designed to confront the difficult reality that both problems are getting worse due to climate change. It also recognizes that innovative and aggressive actions are needed to ensure the safety, resilience, and prosperity of the Basin for future generations.

After more than 10 years of study by government agency and independent scientists, hundreds of meetings, and thousands of comments from Basin residents, the Board will make its recommendations for how to combine and sequence its priority projects and actions in a long-term strategy by the end of 2020.

Q: WHAT IS THE PROPOSED PROJECT UNDER SEPA REVIEW?

This proposed flood protection project is just one of the many projects under consideration for the Strategy. The project would work alongside other local and large-scale projects, and includes:

- A flood protection dam and temporary reservoir on the Chehalis River 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 into 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.

[Click to read more about the proposed project.](#)

Q: WHY WOULD THE OFFICE OF THE CHEHALIS BASIN PROPOSE A DAM?

The Office of the Chehalis Basin and its board has not proposed a dam. The project was proposed by the Flood Control District in Lewis County, and the Chehalis Basin Board supported the Flood District's decision to sponsor the project and forward it for formal environmental review.

Over the years, dozens of options for large-scale actions to protect I-5 and the adjacent population centers of Chehalis and Centralia have been studied and evaluated. In addition to the actions included in the proposed project, these have included:

- **Raising or walling off portions of I-5.** WSDOT and the Ruckelshaus Center found these I-5 changes would not be economically feasible, would increase flood levels in Centralia, and would negatively impact the environment.
- **Basin-wide restorative flood protection.** A feasibility study found that, while helpful in certain kinds of settings, a restorative approach by itself would not prevent the kinds of

devastating flood damages that Chehalis, Centralia and other communities suffered in 2007 and 2009.

The Flood District advanced the current project for more detailed environmental review to help the Board better understand whether it will be more feasible than these previously studied options.

The project would be pursued in concert with local scale flood adaptation and control actions and extensive habitat and natural river function restoration. Right now, the Board is interested in understanding whether the project—in context of this integrated package—can achieve its goal of providing the greatest protection for our communities against floods while still achieving an overall uplift for salmon and other aquatic species in the Basin.

Q: WHAT OTHER INFORMATION DO WE NEED TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHETHER THIS DAM SHOULD BE INCLUDED AS A PART OF THE STRATEGY?

The EIS lays out the adverse environmental impacts of the project, but does not fully consider what the Flood District might be able to do to avoid, minimize or offset those impacts. It also does not include the other positive environmental benefits for salmon and other aquatic species that are being proposed as part of the Strategy's [Aquatic Species Restoration Plan](#).

The Board recognizes there are many other issues – in addition to the environmental effects of the proposed actions – that must be considered before deciding whether the proposed dam should be part of the Strategy. To help evaluate the many social, economic, and other public health and safety considerations they will need to weigh and balance in developing their policy recommendations, the Board is assessing multiple other sources of information in addition to the EIS. Sources related to costs and benefits, including those related to socioeconomics and environmental justice, are all being analyzed as part of the assessment process.

Q: WHAT WILL THE REST OF THE REVIEW PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

The EIS does not approve or deny the project. The report released Feb. 27 is a resource that provides information for all decision-makers to use. It will be taken into consideration by the Flood District to refine their project proposal, and by the Chehalis Basin Board as they draft their long-term strategy and funding recommendations. Permitting agencies will also use the EIS to evaluate any future mitigation plans and permit applications prepared by the Flood District.

Next steps in the review process:

- **Ongoing 2020:** The Flood District will be refining their project proposal and identifying opportunities to avoid, minimize, or offset the adverse impacts identified in the EIS.
- **September 2020:** Expected release of the draft NEPA EIS by the US Army Corps of Engineers, with opportunities for public comment.
- **Fall 2020:** Release of the draft long-term Strategy assessment, with opportunities for public input before the Board recommends how to combine and sequence its priority projects and actions in a long-term strategy by the end of 2020.

Q: WHAT OTHER PROJECTS ARE BEING CONSIDERED?

The dam is just one potential element of a comprehensive strategy. Large-scale habitat restoration investments, such as culvert removal, de-channelization, floodplain reconnection, and more, is proposed in every possible approach for the Chehalis Basin Strategy.

Local actions to limit flood damage will also be embedded in every approach. These actions include flood-proofing homes and buildings, improving flood warning systems, and working with willing landowners to relocate vulnerable structures and acquire or repurpose land to restore natural floodplain functions.

The Feb. 27 EIS analyzes additional types of local-scale actions that could be pursued to help reduce flood damages, but it did not identify or evaluate any other large-scale alternative.