
SEPA Revised Draft EIS for the Chehalis Flood Damage Reduction Project Comment

For more than 100 years, state, local and federal efforts to address flooding and fish enhancement in the Chehalis basin failed. Study after study would be issued with no action while the fish runs declined and flood damage increased for the communities in the basin. Our volunteer citizen group came together after the catastrophic 2007 flood which displaced thousands of families, covered I-5 for five days and caused more than \$920 million in damage according to Washington state. We named our organization “One Voice” to make clear that on this issue, our communities are united. We have pushed for a basin-wide flood solution in combination with aquatic species habitat restoration since 2007. Army Corps research from previous decades and a study from the engineering firm Shannon and Wilson showed holding 62,000 acre feet of flood water above Pe Ell would benefit every community downstream. After reviewing this data, we came out in favor of water retention as part of a basin-wide fish and flood solution.

Tribal and environmental opposition to a conventional dam was clear. We supported the work led through the Governor’s office and the Governors Chehalis Basin Work Group, which directed a worldwide search for a structure that could provide the flood protection benefits of a dam matched by aquatic species protection, especially fish. The state search found this model in Japan in the form of the flow-through dam. Japan is in the process of building their third such structure. As in Washington state, fish and other seafood play a significant role in Japanese culture and economy. If the first of their flow-through dams was not found to be compatible with maintaining fish runs and sediment transport while protecting downstream communities from flooding, that nation would not be now building their third. This is not a new, untested kind of facility, but reading the draft EIS, we wonder if Ecology has spent time looking at the template for the proposed Flood Retention Expandable (FRE) in the Chehalis basin? We believe this proposed FRE can break the historic deadlock in this basin between the fish vs. flood interests, if the facts are put forward clearly and accurately in the final EIS.

Storing 62,000 acre feet of flood water above Pe Ell temporarily during the next catastrophic flood will protect thousands of families from flooding. Families in the floodplain are disproportionately low income and disproportionately Hispanic or members of another minority. After more than a century of study, including 14 years of the current Chehalis basin process, there is no other action that will provide more protection to families, communities, churches, schools, businesses and key infrastructure including I-5 and state highways than this facility.

When our organization was formed, the option of a levee-based plan was on the table. The Army Corps had designed a plan to install levees along I-5. We learned then and still understand that levees don’t reduce the amount of flood water. Levees pick winners and losers by redirecting the flood waters, keeping some areas dry and increasing the flood levels for those misfortunates on the other side.