



January 27th, 2026

SEPA Revised Draft EIS for Chehalis Flood Damage Reduction Project c/o Bobbak Talebi
Southwest Region Office
P.O. Box 47775
Olympia, WA 98504-7775

Re: Snoqualmie Tribe Comments on Chehalis River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Project

Dear Bobbak Talebi,

The Snoqualmie Indian Tribe [Tribe] is a federally recognized sovereign Indian Tribe and a signatory to the Treaty of Point Elliott of 1855 in which it reserved to itself certain rights and privileges and ceded certain lands to the United States. As a signatory to the Treaty of Point Elliott, the Tribe specifically reserved to itself, among other things, the right to fish at usual and accustomed areas and the "privilege of hunting and gathering roots and berries on open and unclaimed lands" off-reservation throughout the modern-day state of Washington. Treaty of Point Elliot, art. V, 12 Stat. 928. The Snoqualmie people have stewarded the waters of Tribal ancestral lands since time immemorial, and the Tribe seeks to continue to protect the waters of the Puget Sound and Washington State's rivers and oceans for future generations. Please consider the Tribe's comments on the SEPA Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement (REIS) for the Chehalis Flood Damage Reduction Project.

The Department of Ecology REIS found that the project has a significant likelihood of degrading critical habitat and causing significant and avoidable harm to salmon and other aquatic species. This would in turn negatively impact tribal cultural resources and the long-term ecological resilience of the basin. The Snoqualmie Tribe strongly opposes the construction of a new flood retention dam on the Chehalis River for these reasons and encourages Department of Ecology to pursue Local Actions Non-Dam (LAND) alternatives.

Impacts on Salmon, Steelhead, and other aquatic species

The REIS concludes that the proposed facility would have significant negative impacts on culturally and ecologically significant spring-run and fall-run Chinook salmon, coho salmon, steelhead, lamprey, mountain whitefish, freshwater mussels, amphibians, and macroinvertebrates both upstream and downstream of the structure during construction and operation. Dam construction



would require substantial water use for activities such as concrete production, dust suppression, dewatering, access road construction, and staging areas, primarily during summer drought times.

The modeling shows that dam operation would also:

- **Reduce genetic diversity** within and among salmon species across Chehalis Basin.
- **Magnify the adverse impacts of climate change** on already declining salmon populations.
- **Degradate water quality** by raising stream temperatures and reducing dissolved oxygen levels.
- **Degradate instream habitat** by reducing channel-forming flows and disrupting sediment and large wood transport necessary for habitat complexity.

These findings are consistent with broader scientific understanding that constructing and operating dams alters hydrology and water temperatures, fragments habitat, and disrupts the life cycles of migratory fish, such as salmon and steelhead.^{1,2}

Dam construction is in conflict with restoration goals

Constructing a new dam for flood control undermines the stated goals of the Chehalis Basin Aquatic Species Restoration Program of restoring and protecting aquatic ecosystem health³ and the millions of dollars spent annually on salmon recovery throughout the state to remove fish passage barriers and restore habitat^{4,5}.

Dam construction and operation would:

- **Remove trees and riparian vegetation**, reducing shading, organic material inputs, and sources of large wood.
- **Impact fish passage** in construction and operation.
- **Reduce floodplain and side-channel habitat** that salmon rely on for refuge, feeding, and rearing.

These impacts would directly negatively impact aquatic health and function and limit future restoration options in the subbasins above and below the proposed dam and in the Chehalis basin as a whole.

Building a dam at the proposed location for flood management is shortsighted and does not reflect the numerous scientifically backed alternatives for flood management that also improve habitat.

¹ [Collins 1976](#)

² [Ligon et al. 1995](#)

³ [Chehalis Basin Strategy](#)

⁴ [Governor's salmon strategy update](#)

⁵ [State of Salmon](#)



LAND alternatives, such as floodplain reconnection and riparian restoration, voluntary buyouts, and elevating structures are more compatible with ecological restoration goals and economically viable. Please listen to the science and indigenous knowledge gained from the stewardship of these lands from time immemorial and reject this project and instead pursue proven alternatives to flood management that support healthy rivers and salmon populations as well as the nearby communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

 Matt Baerwalde

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Matt Baerwalde

Senior Environmental Policy Analyst