

Paige Palmer

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to express strong opposition to the Revised Chehalis Dam Proposal. The proposed project is costly, unnecessary, and would cause lasting harm to the Chehalis River, Tribal communities, salmon populations, and the broader ecosystem, while failing to provide reliable or equitable flood protection.

The proposed dam is estimated to cost up to \$2 billion, yet there is no clear or viable plan to fund its construction. In all likelihood, this enormous financial burden would fall on Washington taxpayers. At a time when public resources are urgently needed for housing, infrastructure resilience, climate adaptation, and ecosystem restoration, committing billions of dollars to a single, controversial project with limited benefits is fiscally irresponsible.

Effective and less harmful alternatives already exist. The Local Actions Non-Dam proposal offers basin-wide flood mitigation solutions that benefit the entire Chehalis watershed, rather than protecting only certain structures some of the time, as the proposed dam would. These alternatives emphasize community resilience, floodplain restoration, and targeted local actions that address flooding without permanently damaging the river.

Across the country, we are in an era of dam removal, not new dam construction. Hundreds of dams have been removed in recent decades because of the profound damage they cause to rivers, fish populations, water quality, and communities. Constructing a new large dam on one of Washington's last free-flowing rivers runs counter to this national and regional movement toward river restoration and climate-resilient infrastructure.

The proposed dam would also cause irreparable harm to local Tribes, their cultures, and their treaty-protected rights. Tribal nations in the region have spoken in opposition to the project, citing impacts to cultural sites, fishing practices, and their deep, ongoing relationship with the river. Proceeding with a project that would disproportionately harm Tribal communities is unjust and inconsistent with the state's commitments to Tribal sovereignty and consultation.

Environmentally, the impacts would be severe and permanent. The dam would drown critical salmon and steelhead spawning habitat, degrade water quality, reduce wildlife habitat, and increase water temperatures—conditions that further stress already vulnerable fish populations. These impacts would undermine decades of investment in salmon recovery efforts throughout the watershed.

The Chehalis River is the largest watershed entirely within the state of Washington and one of the few remaining free-flowing, undammed rivers on the West Coast. It is one of the top salmon-producing rivers in the state, with the majority of its salmon runs consisting of wild fish rather than hatchery-origin fish. Although Chehalis River salmon are not currently listed as endangered, they have declined dramatically from historic levels, and additional stressors could push these populations toward irreversible collapse.

Importantly, Chehalis River salmon are part of the Washington Coast stock, which is designated as

a priority Chinook stock for the endangered Southern Resident killer whales. NOAA data show that Southern Resident orcas continue to target Chinook salmon as their preferred prey year-round, and that outer coast Chinook are an especially important food source during the winter months. Tagging data further indicate that Southern Resident orcas are likely foraging off Grays Harbor near the mouth of the Chehalis River. Any action that reduces Chinook abundance in this watershed directly undermines efforts to recover this critically endangered orca population.

For these reasons, I urge you to reject the Revised Chehalis Dam Proposal and instead invest in proven, non-dam alternatives that protect communities, respect Tribal rights, preserve a rare free-flowing river, and support salmon and orca recovery. Washington can and should pursue flood protection solutions that work with the river, not against it.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Sincerely,
Paige Palmer