

Kendra Nelson

I am a marine biologist and conservationist commenting in concern and opposition regarding the Chehalis River dam project. This is not the time for new dam projects, as research and experience have proven the harms dams have to ecosystems and species such as salmon and the critically endangered Southern Resident killer whales.

The Chehalis River is a vital habitat for wild salmon, including Chinook salmon, which are crucial to the endangered Southern Resident killer whales. Construction of the dam would inundate approximately 847 acres and extend 6.2 miles, leading to the loss of critical spawning and rearing habitats. This alteration could significantly disrupt the life cycles of salmon species, potentially reducing their populations.

Looking at dam removals that have occurred on the Elwha and Klamath, there are clear negative impacts of dams to critical species. Critical to the ecosystem, wildlife, as well as humans. Salmon is an important resource to communities and industries. Salmon already deal with a severe decline in habitat quality and access to habitat. A new dam would only add another hurdle and hardship to local salmon.

The Chehalis River Basin is integral to the cultural and subsistence practices of local tribes, including the Quinault Indian Nation. The dam's construction would inundate tribal lands, disrupting traditional activities such as fishing, hunting, and gathering. The loss of salmon populations would further threaten the cultural heritage and food security of these communities. Dams also negatively impact communities, beyond just the impact to fish. While the Chehalis dam aims to reduce flooding, its construction could displace residents and businesses, leading to economic hardship and loss of community cohesion. Additionally, the dam's effectiveness in flood mitigation has been questioned, with concerns that it may not provide significant benefits to downstream communities. Flooding caused by the dam could submerge or damage sites of historical and cultural significance to Indigenous peoples, leading to the loss of irreplaceable cultural heritage.

There are alternative options to flood management. These include floodplain restoration, improved drainage systems, levee improvements, building elevation, voluntary buyouts, and land use planning. And these should be looked further into and an alternate plan that utilizes a combination of these methods would be more beneficial to the entire ecosystem.

I hope that these impacts and alternate solutions are considered. Below will be studies to review as well that demonstrate the impacts of dams. It is easier to not build a dam than it is to mitigate the impacts once a dam is in place.

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<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/4976/upstream-salmon-and-society-in-the-pacific-northwest>
<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaa9204>
<https://online.ucpress.edu/elementa/article/doi/10.12952/journal.elementa.000108/112905/River-restor>
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