

Orca Behavior Institute (Monika Shields)

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to oppose the construction of a dam as a way to mitigate flooding in the Chehalis River Basin. I believe the impacts on wild salmon, and consequently also on tribes and the endangered Southern Resident killer whales, are too great to risk, especially because there are viable non-dam alternatives.

With recent dam removal projects on the Pacific Coast ranging from the Elwha to the Klamath, it's clear this is an era of dam removal, not dam construction. The Chehalis remains a free-flowing river, resulting in its being one of the top salmon producing rivers in the state of Washington. A dam would drown spawning habitat, increase water temperatures, and degrade water quality. The DEIS acknowledges that there would be significant adverse impacts on salmon.

I have studied the Southern Resident killer whales for over 20 years and am well aware of their movements and dietary requirements throughout their range and throughout the year. K and L Pods specifically spend the late winter and early spring months on the outer coast of Washington and Oregon. Salmon returning to the Chehalis are part of the Washington Coast salmon stock identified as a priority source of Chinook for the Southern Residents, and they spend regular time foraging right off Grays Harbor where the Chehalis meets the ocean. The whales have now been on the endangered species list for 20 years, yet their population continues to decline. We need to be looking for ways to increase the abundance and quality of fish they have available rather than putting one of their key prey resources at further risk.

Non-dam alternatives exist, including elevating buildings and bridges and investing in other more natural upstream methods of flood control. These solutions would likely cost less and are supported by tribes, environmental groups, and the residents who live in the flood plain.

The first proposal for a dam on the Chehalis failed for a reason. Constructing new dams is not the way forward to the future we all want for the west coast, one where people can live safely in a changing climate alongside wild salmon runs that are also adapting to a changing world. We need to give wild salmon the best opportunity to survive, and that means staying out of their way - in this case literally, by keeping the river free-flowing. The environmental impacts are clear, and a dam on the Chehalis River is not the right solution for flood control.

Thank you for your consideration
Monika Wieland Shields
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