

John Wert

I wish to offer information against the proposed Chehalis Dam at Pe Ell. The dam is located almost at the top of the east flowing branch of the Chehalis River and would be ineffective for any type of flood control. It appears that Pe Ell was chosen primarily because there is a lot of unoccupied flat land suitable for a dam located behind the dam site, which in and of itself is insufficient to build a dam there. What data do you have that supports flood type water flow at the proposed dam site? Construction of a dam would certainly inundate the surrounding land leading to loss of life, habitat, and food sources for local wildlife: birds (ducks, raptors, tundra swans, trumpeter swans, sora, american bittern), raptors (osprey, gyrfalcon), turkey vultures, virginia rail, fish (chinook, coho, chum salmon, green sturgeon, white sturgeon) and trout (winter steelhead, bull trout, cutthroat trout, rainbow trout) as well as a variety of game species. The river is also a crucial food source for Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW), as well as the Quinault Indian Nation, and others. It could also submerge or damage sites of historical and cultural significance to indigenous peoples, leading to the loss of irreplaceable cultural heritage.

In a 2/15/21 op-ed published in the Chronicle (Centralia), using cherry picked data from state paid surveys and a draft federal environmental study, the potential impacts on salmon and steelhead from the proposed dam on the Upper Chehalis River were minimized. While it is true that Chinook have returned to the upper river in very low numbers in recent years, the same fish surveys found that significant numbers of adult fall Chinook, coho and steelhead returned to the dam's impact area where "spawning occurred almost continuously from September through June." The Governor's State of the Salmon report (2024) underscores that habitat protection and restoration represent our best chance to reverse the decline of salmon.

he Upper Chehalis River where the dam would be built is relatively undeveloped and offers one of the better habitat restoration opportunities in the entire state. Especially for spring Chinook. The upper river historically was one of three strongholds in the Chehalis Basin for springers. Salmon strongholds are not just places where fish are found in large numbers: they are also keepers of the genetic and spatial diversity that make salmon so resilient and able to adapt to changes in their environment. Creating the conditions salmon need to rebuild that diversity is just as important to recovery as boosting their numbers.

The state of Washington's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) found that the dam poses "significant impacts from both construction and operation." The Quinault Indian Nation found, based on independent scientific analysis, that both the state and federal government studies dramatically underestimate the dam's impacts. Despite dam backers' assertions, the proposed Chehalis dam and temporary reservoir would have most of the same catastrophic effects on fish as a typical dam.

The original analysis under the 2020 draft EIS stated that the dam would have significant adverse effects, such as: reducing fall-run salmon and trout (SRKW prey), reducing native aquatic species and wildlife, degrading habitat, degrading water quality, and increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Other solutions do exist.