

Christina Zolko

I am writing to oppose the proposed flow-through dam in the Chehalis River Basin as outlined in the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement. While flooding is an undeniable and serious concern in our basin, building this dam is the wrong solution, both environmentally and fiscally, and does not adequately protect all communities.

According to Ecology's revised draft EIS, the proposed dam would have significant adverse impacts on fish, wildlife, water quality, wetlands, tribal cultural resources, and river processes, even with the mitigation measures currently proposed. The study itself finds these impacts unavoidable in many categories without fully feasible mitigation. Salmon, steelhead, lamprey and other native species are already in decline in the Chehalis Basin. Adding a large flood retention structure with a temporary reservoir risks further degrading essential habitat at a time when we should be restoring it.

I am also concerned that the benefits of this structure are limited in scope. The dam would only operate during major flood events and would not prevent ordinary annual flooding throughout the basin. It would protect some communities while leaving many others, particularly in the lower basin and along tributaries, still exposed to hazardous floods. A multi-billion-dollar investment that doesn't equitably protect all residents, homes, farms and businesses is unacceptable.

Instead of pouring hundreds of millions into a dam that may give only incremental flood reduction benefits, let's invest in proven, equitable, and less destructive alternatives:

- Elevating homes, businesses, utilities and critical infrastructure out of floodwaters, helping people stay safe without altering river ecosystems.
- Acquiring and relocating flood-prone properties and preventing additional development in high-risk floodplain areas.
- Restoring natural floodplain function, wetlands and forests that slow stormwater and store flood flows more safely and sustainably.
- Strengthening local levees where appropriate and improving culverts, pump systems and other floodproofing measures.

Flood damage in the Chehalis Basin is the result of decades of land use, floodplain development, and narrow engineering responses. Doing more of the same, even with a fancy name like "flow-through dam", is not a long-term solution. We should be using public funds wisely to protect people and communities while safeguarding the environment upon which we all depend.

I urge the Department of Ecology, Chehalis Basin Flood Control Zone District, and decision-makers to reject the dam alternative in the final EIS and instead prioritize non-dam, community-centered solutions that reduce flood risk for everyone.

Thank you for considering this comment.

Sincerely,
Christina Zolko