

Vanessa LaValle

I oppose the FRE. It is a tragedy to commit to such large a purchase without funding. I imagine our Chehalis Basin tax dollars, flood district funds and proposed bonds will follow at a time when the average resident is crushed with rising prices, inflation and low wages. Especially when there is not an identified owner/operator. Not only will installing this thing involve logging the headwaters that Spring Chinook rely on condemning them to extinction, but the proposals do not outline what possible mitigation could exist. How can they keep temperatures low on the streams when the tree cover has been removed? How can they ensure they won't cause landslides? Moreover, this would be a way to paper over how developers have continued to focus new construction in the floodplain when the floodplain should not be constructed on. Forest practices have not changed although that was a key item in Governor Gregoire's original recommendations.

The flooding events we are living through this winter would not have triggered the dam. Even if it had triggered the dam, it wouldn't benefit Newaukum or Skookumchuck residents in anyway. Prioritizing business as usual will doom our community as it always does. Dams only have a lifetime of up to 100 years, so our grandchildren will have to take it down at great cost to them in the future. We could save the trouble and use rational approaches to manage continued flooding threat – emphasizing local levees; dykes; floodwalls; raising homes; amending forest practices; and a reduction in floodplain development.

I understand the desire to rally behind a public works project, it makes solutions sound easy and within reach, but the reality is our flooding situation in the basin is more complex and cannot be addressed the FRE/dam and it is not worth the price tag. It will do nothing for our friends in Newaukum for example. 2024 was the hottest year on record with average temperatures continuing to rise. We will experience warmer and higher volume rainfall across the entire basin. Ruining the headwaters at Pe El will only accomplish the extinction of Spring Chinook. It will not be operational for another 20 years and residents will be paying out of our pockets during an affordability crisis. Forest practices have not changed although that was a key item in Governor Gregoire's original recommendations. Our agricultural lands are so rich because of the repetitive flooding. This is how our topsoil is replenished at a time when global figures for topsoil are declining.

In 2021 when FRE was first proposed it was clear the costs would outweigh the potential benefits. How many homes could have been raised with the funds spent on redeveloping this plan? How many levees, floodwalls and dykes could already be in operation?