

Ronda Larson Kramer

Science-based, non-dam flood solutions already exist for the Chehalis Basin. Floodplain reconnection, side-channel and wetland restoration, strategic relocation from high-risk areas, and investments in resilient local infrastructure reduce flood risk while improving salmon habitat and river function. These approaches are adaptive, cost-effective, and consistent with modern climate science. Because feasible, less-damaging alternatives are available, construction of a dam is unnecessary.

For that reason, and because of the State's treaty obligations, I strongly oppose any Chehalis Basin Strategy alternative that includes a dam on the Chehalis River.

The Chehalis River supports salmon, steelhead, lamprey, and other species that are essential to the exercise of treaty-protected fishing rights held by Tribal nations, including the Quinault Indian Nation. These rights are binding legal obligations of the State, not discretionary interests. State actions that permanently degrade habitat and reduce fish abundance directly impair those rights.

A dam on the Chehalis River would cause irreversible harm to aquatic habitat and salmon productivity. Courts have made clear that treaty fishing rights include the right to a fishery that is not rendered meaningless by State-authorized habitat destruction. A project that knowingly diminishes the resource itself violates that standard.

The Department of Ecology has an affirmative duty to ensure that State actions do not infringe upon treaty rights, including through indirect environmental impacts. Authorizing a dam that permanently reduces salmon productivity—despite the availability of effective alternatives—would place the State in conflict with its treaty obligations and established federal and state law.

Climate change further underscores the need for adaptive, basin-wide approaches rather than rigid structural infrastructure. A dam represents a high-impact, inflexible project that locks the basin into long-term ecological harm while delivering limited and uncertain flood-control benefits.

The Chehalis River is one of Washington's last largely free-flowing rivers. Proceeding with a dam that degrades treaty-protected fisheries, when non-dam solutions can protect communities and restore habitat, would be inconsistent with Ecology's legal responsibilities and the public interest.

I urge the Department of Ecology to reject any dam alternative and to advance a Chehalis Basin Strategy that prioritizes non-dam flood solutions, honors treaty obligations, respects Tribal sovereignty, and protects salmon habitat for present and future generations.

Respectfully,
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