

Alexia Bailey

I am writing to formally oppose the proposed dam on the Chehalis River. I am deeply concerned about its long-term ecological, cultural, and community impacts—particularly the threat it poses to wild salmon and the endangered Southern Resident killer whales that depend on them for survival.

The Southern Resident orca population remains perilously small, hovering in the low 70s. Recent years have underscored how fragile this population is, with the loss of calves and breeding adults highlighting the ongoing struggle for survival. The primary limiting factor is well documented: insufficient access to Chinook salmon. Any action that further constrains salmon abundance directly undermines recovery efforts for these federally protected whales.

The Chehalis River is an important stronghold for wild salmon, including Chinook. Flooding more than 800 acres of river valley and permanently altering over six miles of river would eliminate spawning and rearing habitat that salmon need at critical stages of their life cycle. These losses are not easily mitigated or replaced, and they would reverberate throughout the food web—from aquatic species to top apex predators like the Southern Residents.

Because Southern Resident killer whales are protected under the Endangered Species Act, actions that degrade their primary food source raise serious legal and ethical concerns. A project that knowingly increases pressure on Chinook salmon populations risks placing the region further out of compliance with federal recovery obligations.

Beyond environmental harm, the proposed dam carries significant human costs. It would displace residents and businesses, disrupt communities, and potentially impose economic hardship—while offering uncertain flood protection benefits. Previous analyses have already identified substantial adverse effects, including harm to salmon, steelhead, lamprey, amphibians, water quality, wetlands, and increased greenhouse gas emissions. These impacts should not be minimized or revisited lightly.

The Chehalis River Basin is also inseparable from the cultural, spiritual, and subsistence practices of Tribal Nations, including the Quinault Indian Nation. Inundating tribal lands and diminishing salmon runs would directly threaten treaty-reserved rights, food security, and cultural continuity. Damage or loss of culturally significant sites would be irreversible.

Additionally, altering the river's natural character would reduce recreational opportunities such as fishing, boating, and wildlife viewing—activities that support local quality of life and regional economies.

And there are alternatives. Floodplain restoration, smarter land-use planning, levee improvements, drainage upgrades, voluntary buyouts, and home elevation projects offer paths to flood risk reduction without sacrificing a living river or further endangering imperiled species. These approaches deserve serious investment and prioritization over large-scale structural interventions that cause lasting harm.

For the sake of salmon recovery, Southern Resident orcas, Tribal sovereignty, and future generations who depend on healthy rivers, I urge decision-makers to reject the proposed Chehalis

River dam and pursue more sustainable, community-centered flood management solutions.

Thank you for considering my comment.