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I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Chehalis River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Project. While flood mitigation is an urgent and legitimate need in the Chehalis Basin, this project—particularly the proposed dam—poses unacceptable environmental, economic, and cultural risks, while diverting funding away from more effective, comprehensive, and less destructive alternatives.

Economic Impacts on Fishing and Hunting

The Chehalis River system sustains robust fishing and hunting opportunities that contribute significantly to the regional and tribal economies. Salmon, steelhead, and other fish species are already under stress from habitat loss, warming waters, and declining population numbers. The construction and long-term operation of a dam would further degrade critical spawning and rearing habitat, threatening these fisheries. Fewer fish mean fewer guided trips, reduced tourism revenue, fewer jobs in local sporting businesses, and direct financial harm to both tribal and non-tribal fishers.

The basin's hunting economy would also suffer. Road-building, habitat fragmentation, noise, and long-term landscape alteration directly affect elk, deer, birds, and other wildlife critical to local hunting culture and associated revenue. Healthy ecosystems support healthy wildlife populations—massive infrastructure projects do not.

Misallocation of Funds Away From Real Solutions

Flood mitigation funding is finite. Committing enormous financial resources to a dam—an expensive project with limited public benefit—diverts money from more comprehensive and sustainable flood-management solutions. Proven alternatives already exist, including:

- Targeted structural improvements and levee projects
- Floodplain restoration and reconnection
- Improving upstream storage through natural processes
- Raising or flood-proofing vulnerable infrastructure
- Voluntary buyouts in repeatedly flooded zones

These approaches address flooding while simultaneously supporting fish recovery, community resilience, and long-term ecological health. The dam, by contrast, creates a narrow and costly single-point intervention that fails to solve the systemic drivers of flood risk.

Environmental Damage From Extensive Road Construction

The proposed project requires extensive, permanent road construction into undeveloped forest and river areas. These roads would:

- Fragment habitat used by fish, amphibians, and terrestrial wildlife
- Increase sedimentation entering tributaries and the mainstem river
- Create long-term erosion and water-quality problems
- Open previously intact habitat to vehicle access, poaching, invasive species, and further degradation

The cumulative environmental harm from road-building alone would undermine decades of restoration work undertaken by state agencies, tribes, and local conservation groups.

Impacts to the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation

Perhaps most importantly, the dam poses a serious threat to the rights, cultural heritage, and traditional lifeways of the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation. The Chehalis people have depended on the river since time immemorial for food, ceremony, identity, and survival. The river is not merely a landscape feature—it is a living part of the Tribe's culture and sovereignty.

Reducing fish populations, altering river flow, disturbing cultural sites, and interfering with access

to traditional hunting and gathering areas would inflict lasting harm on the Chehalis people. Moving forward with a project that jeopardizes tribal resources directly contradicts the state's stated commitments to tribal consultation, co-management, and respect for treaty and non-treaty tribal rights.

Conclusion

The Chehalis Basin deserves real flood protection, but not at the cost of its ecosystems, tribal rights, and long-term economic health. The proposed dam is an outdated and destructive approach that will create more harm than benefit. I urge decision-makers to reject this proposal and instead invest in comprehensive, science-based solutions that enhance resilience without sacrificing the ecological and cultural integrity of the Chehalis River.