



Thursday, April 30, 2026

Dam Safety Office
Washington State Department of Ecology
P.O. Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Re: Snoqualmie Indian Tribe Comments on Draft Dam Safety Policy

Dear Samantha Long:

The Snoqualmie Indian Tribe [Tribe] is a federally recognized sovereign Indian Tribe and a signatory to the Treaty of Point Elliott of 1855 in which it reserved inherent and treaty-protected rights, including the right to fish at usual and accustomed areas and the privilege of hunting and gathering roots and berries on open and unclaimed lands throughout its ancestral territory (Treaty of Point Elliott, art. V, 12 Stat. 928). The Snoqualmie People have stewarded the rivers, forests, and lands of the Snoqualmie Valley and surrounding region since time immemorial, and the Tribe remains committed to working collaboratively with the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) to protect these resources for future generations.

The Tribe has reviewed the Draft Dam Safety Policy, and the 2026 statewide Dam Inventory. The inventory identifies numerous dams statewide including 122 in King County and 65 in Snohomish County, many located within watersheds of deep cultural and ecological significance to the Snoqualmie Tribe. The Draft Policy, while clarifying elements of dam regulation, contains several critical gaps regarding Tribal consultation, climate readiness, emergency communication, ecological protections, and cumulative risk evaluation. These gaps create unsuitable risks to treaty- and reserved-rights resources, culturally important species, and community safety.

The Tribe is especially concerned that the Draft Policy allows emergency actions, hazard classification determinations, and decisions affecting multiple connected impoundments to occur without Tribal consultation. Ecology's commitments and obligations under Executive Orders 21-02 and 25-10 require meaningful government-to-government engagement when agency decisions may impact Tribal Rights, waters, cultural resources, or ecosystems.

Government-to-Government Consultation

The Draft Policy does not require consultation with Tribes for permitting, hazard classification, inspections, emergency planning, or system determinations. These decisions directly affect the health of rivers, salmon, and cultural landscapes fundamental to the Tribe's treaty and sovereign and inherent rights and stewardship responsibilities.

Request: Insert mandatory Tribal consultation requirements early in the process and at all regulatory decision points including the permitting process.



Emergency Actions and Tribal Notification

The Draft Policy allows Ecology to carry out emergency actions including SEPA-exempt operational changes without notifying Tribes. Sudden flow changes or drawdowns can harm salmon habitat, floodplains, and culturally significant sacred places.

Request: Require immediate Tribal notification and coordination prior to any emergency or discretionary action under WAC 173-175-610.

Climate Adjusted Hydrology

The Draft Policy does not incorporate updated precipitation forecasts or climate-based hydrologic modeling. Intensifying storms and changing hydrology increase downstream risk for Tribal communities and ecosystems.

Request: Require consideration of climate-adjusted flood elevations in design, climate-informed risk modeling, and updated inspection cycles aligned with evolving climate conditions.

Ecological and Treaty Resource Protections

The Draft Policy narrowly focuses on structural dam safety and omits ecological considerations such as fish passage, river temperature impacts, and cumulative flow modification. These omissions conflict with the Tribe's treaty and reserved rights and holistic stewardship obligations.

Request: Integrate fish and cultural resources protective measures into Emergency Action Plans (EAP) and require ecological impact considerations in dam design, operation, and inspection.

Cumulative Impacts and Connected Storage Systems

The Draft Policy recognizes multi dam systems but does not address cumulative risks from industrial ponds, wastewater lagoons, cooling reservoirs, or other hydrologically connected storage systems. These facilities are numerous statewide and pose additional risks to water quality and aquatic species.

Request: Require cumulative watershed impact analysis for all hydrologically connected storage systems, including industrial and agricultural facilities.

Tribal Representation in Emergency Management

The Draft Policy grants Ecology broad authority during emergency conditions yet establishes no role for Tribal governments within dam related emergency management frameworks. Tribal participation is essential for culturally informed decision making and for protecting traditional food systems, downstream communities, and treaty-guaranteed resources.

Request: Establish formal Tribal representation within emergency management structures, including:

- Inclusion of Tribal emergency management officials in dam emergency response coordination.
- Direct Tribal participation in the development, review, and exercises of Emergency Action Plans (EAPs).
- Standing Tribal seats within any multi-agency emergency management or dam-safety incident command structures.

Conclusion



To uphold Tribal sovereignty, treaty and reserved rights, and the State's consultation obligations, the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe respectfully requests that Ecology revise the Draft Dam Safety Policy to include:

- Mandatory Tribal consultation requirements at all stages of decision making
- Immediate Tribal notification for all emergency actions
- Climate-informed hydrologic and hazard modeling
- Ecological protections for water quality and fish and wildlife species that rely on aquatic habitats
- Cumulative watershed impact evaluations
- Formal Tribal representation in emergency management

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg King".

Greg King

Geologist

Snoqualmie Indian Tribe