DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY
State of Washington

FISH AND WILDLIFE FACT SHEET

Chehalis River Oxbow
Photo Credit: Rollingbay Works

CHEHALIS BASIN STRATEGY PROGRAMMATIC EIS

This programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) evaluates options to reduce flood damage and restore aquatic species habitat in the Chehalis River Basin.

These options are made up of actions, grouped into programs called alternatives.

The basin has experienced both major flooding and wide-spread degradation of aquatic species habitat. These problems have continued for almost 100 years without a coordinated response.

The Chehalis Basin Strategy will need to provide a long-term, integrated approach to positively effect change in the Chehalis Basin.

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Programmatic EIS: How it's different

A programmatic State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review considers the effects of a broad proposal or planning-level decisions. The impact assessment in a programmatic EIS is more qualitative than a project-specific environmental review. Mitigation measures are also more general and focus on actions that could be implemented or might be required.

Fish and wildlife analyzed for environmental review

The draft programmatic EIS evaluates how both individual actions, and the alternatives they are combined into, could affect fish and wildlife.

Fish species studied include salmon, trout, lamprey, Olympic mudminnow, sculpin and others. Wildlife species studied include amphibians, reptiles, small and large mammals, waterfowl and birds. Fish and wildlife species in the Chehalis Basin support recreational and commercial fisheries and are also important resources for tribes.

Which impacts are analyzed?

In the draft EIS , Ecology looks at both short- and long-term impacts. Beneficial impacts of the proposed actions are identified and explained. We also identify negative impacts, and determine whether they are minor, moderate or significant.

Minor impacts are usually small, and easily mitigated. Moderate impacts are adverse, affect a relatively small area within the Chehalis Basin, and are not likely to exceed regulatory limits or criteria. Mitigation for moderate impacts is thought to be reasonably achievable. Significant impacts affect relatively larger areas and are more severe. Impacts that are considered significant are more likely to exceed regulatory limits or criteria and are difficult to mitigate.

This fact sheet provides a very general overview for public outreach purposes. This summary does not include all aspects of the analysis. Detailed analysis, data and findings are available in the Draft EIS, Chapters 4 and 5 online at **http://chehalisbasinstrategy.com/eis-library/**.

Waterbodies in the Chehalis Basin provide habitat for salmon and trout that could be affected by the EIS alternatives.

Photo credit: Anchor QEA

Elk habitat concentration areas are located in the Chehalis Basin and in the surrounding areas.

Photo credit: Jeffrey Seldomridge

The Chehalis Basin has the highest species richness of amphibians in Washington.

Photo credit: Caitlyn McIntyre

How would the individual actions affect fish and wildlife?

Impacts to fish and wildlife from the action elements range from beneficial to adverse and significant. Some Large-Scale Flood Damage Reduction actions would benefit fish and wildlife, while others would have an adverse impact. Negative impacts could include short-term impacts from construction and long-term impacts from permanent changes to habitat.

Local-Scale Flood Damage Reduction actions are likely to result in minor adverse impacts on fish and wildlife, except when local projects include bank stabilization. Bank stabilization projects may cumulatively have more significant adverse impacts from permanent changes to habitat.

Aquatic Species Habitat actions result in long-term benefits to fish and wildlife through improvements to habitat and improved fish passage.

How the combined alternatives affect fish and wildlife

Alternative 1 includes a dam and either a permanent or temporary reservoir, raising the Chehalis-Centralia Airport levee, and building a levee around low-lying portions of Aberdeen and Hoquiam. A major difference between Alternative 1 and the other alternatives is the effect on salmon and other aquatic species that use the main stem of the Chehalis River upstream and immediately downstream of the dam.

The dam associated with Alternative 1 may have significant adverse impacts on some populations, species or life stages of salmonids and lamprey. When combined with Aquatic Species Habitat actions, many of these impacts would be lessened at a basin-wide scale. Alternative 1 would temporarily or permanently flood fish and wildlife habitat, and change current flood regimes that affect some amphibians. Over time, potential habitat impacts could change the makeup of wildlife species in the basin. The long-term impacts on wildlife species vary based on their different habitat needs, home ranges and responses to changes in their habitat.

By comparison, Alternative 2, which includes walls and levees along Interstate 5, would result in fewer and less significant impacts to fish and wildlife than Alternative 1. Alternative 3, which does not include any Large-Scale Flood Damage Reduction actions, would result in still fewer and very minor potential adverse impacts on fish and wildlife. With Alternatives 2 and 3, there would still be the potential for long-term negative impacts on fish and wildlife, and their habitat, during major floods.

Alternatives 2 and 3 would benefit fish and aquatic wildlife more than Alternative 1, because they would exclude the permanent and large-scale changes to the Chehalis River and its floodplain caused by a dam and reservoir. Carrying out the Aquatic Species Habitat actions included in all of the action alternatives would greatly increase riparian area and salmon abundance. This would benefit other aquatic species as well.

Alternative 4 would have the most benefit to fish and wildlife as compared to the other action alternatives, through implementing the Restorative Flood Protection and Aquatic Species Habitat action elements.