Lower Chehalis River Ecological Region Overview

What are important/unique features and functions within this Ecological Region?

- The Chehalis River has the highest densities of coho salmon per area of watershed, which is related to the abundance of overwintering habitat naturally provided in the wide and meandering floodplain. It also has the highest densities of native stillwater-breeding amphibians and native non-salmonid fish.
- Migratory fish from all sub-basins above the tidal areas pass through this region, making its ecological function more impactful to large areas.
- The floodplain is extensive along the river's mainstem through the Lower Chehalis River Ecological Region, which could present numerous opportunities for floodplain reconnection.
- This area has the largest amount of diverse off-channel habitats of all the Ecological Regions.

What is working? What is broken?

- This Ecological Region is lacking wood nearly everywhere.
- There is limited spawning habitat (identified between Oakville and Porter) and summer temperatures are too high to support juvenile salmonid rearing.
- Non-native species such as bull frogs and bass (smallmouth and largemouth) are prevalent throughout this Ecological Region. The timing of introduction of these species is unknown, but they are all major piscivores that are known to or likely to have negative interactions with native fishes.
- There are invasive exotic plant species including reed canarygrass.
- This Ecological Region has experienced the greatest loss of floodplain wetland habitats.
- The main channel is more connected to its floodplain in this Ecological Region than in the Middle Chehalis River Ecological Region. Riparian zones are narrow to non-existent, there is very little wood, and moderate lengths of riprap and channel control are found in much of the reach.

What are your thoughts about some of the protection and restoration strategies and actions we feel are important for this Ecological Region?

- Protect cold water inputs, and attempt to better understand these areas for protection.
- Protect existing riparian forest.
- Protect and restore existing wet prairie habitats.
- Restore depressional-intermediate hydroperiod wetlands.
- Restore instream structures and pool frequency with large wood installations.
- Test restoration of floodplain wetlands that dry out in the summer.

Lower mainstem habitats are limited in diversity and could be enhanced by wood, riparian restoration, and off-channel reconnection actions.

Gravel bars are prevalent in the Lower Chehalis River near river mile 35. Both in-channel and floodplain habitats could be enhanced with wood and riparian restoration.

Several floodplain areas in the Lower Chehalis River Ecological Region are owned by Washington State or the Chehalis Tribe. This site is seasonal floodplain habitat protected by the Chehalis Tribe, which could be an important location to experiment and learn from restoration techniques.

Lower mainstem habitats have degraded riparian conditions, as shown here across from a boat launch near Porter. Substantial recreational river use and sport fishing occur throughout the Lower Chehalis River Ecological Region.

Hoxit Pond, which is already protected, is an example of off-channel conditions that could be enhanced or restored in other locations to provide important habitat for amphibians.

Backwaters and remaining side-channels along the mainstem Chehalis River provide opportunities for restoration.