

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM OFFICE OF CHEHALIS BASIN PUBLIC MEETINGS (MARCH 15, 2021)

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Thank you for your involvement with [the Chehalis Basin Strategy](#). This FAQ document focuses on the most common topics and questions that arose during the latest series of public meetings hosted by the Office of Chehalis Basin (OCB) on November 10, 2020, February 17, 2021, and March 9, 2021.

You can also access the recordings of the meetings [here](#) to listen to the full presentations and hear the entirety of questions and comments that were raised at the meetings.

## FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION

**Q: What work has been done to identify potentially flood-prone homes and businesses in the Chehalis River floodplain, and where can I find more information about how climate change will impact the 1,200+ families living in the 100-year floodplain of the Chehalis Basin?**

A: Both the draft State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and draft National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for the proposed flood retention facility and airport levee improvement project analyzed potentially flood-prone homes and businesses. Those documents include estimates of the number of valuable structures, like homes and businesses, affected by major and catastrophic floods in the basin that could be protected by the proposed project. Climate change analysis was integrated into the Department of Ecology's draft SEPA EIS using data from the University of Washington's Climate Impacts Group. OCB recently worked with the Climate Impacts Group to update these climate change projections to consider a higher range of potential increases in future precipitation and flooding. You can view a comparison table of the climate change projections [here](#). Additionally, OCB is using the updated climate change predictions to identify additional areas where more homes and businesses will be at risk of flooding in the future. You can view maps of these different future floodplain extents and depths [here](#) (see slides 17-28).

**Q: I have questions and concerns about certain aspects of the proposed Chehalis-Centralia airport levee improvements. Where can I share those?**

A: A description of the proposed Chehalis-Centralia airport levee improvements is available from the Flood District's project description [here](#) (see pages 11-12). More detailed explanations of the levee portion of the project can be found in the Flood District's clarification letters submitted to the Department of Ecology and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as part of the SEPA and NEPA EIS process, [here](#) and [here](#). The formal public comment periods on draft SEPA and NEPA EISs have closed.

Additional questions or concerns about the Chehalis-Centralia airport levee improvement project can be directed to the Flood District. Contact information for the District is available [here](#).

**Q: Will the Aberdeen-Hoquiam North Shore Levee project protect Grays Harbor infrastructure, and is there planned mitigation for the project?**

A: The North Shore Levee project will construct a 6.2 mile levee across the two cities, providing flood protection to public infrastructure and removing over 3,100 properties and 994 businesses from FEMA's mapped Special Flood Hazard Area. The cities of Aberdeen and Hoquiam have additional information about the North Shore Levee project [here](#).

**Q: Is there full or partial funding available now for willing landowners to replace undersized culverts? If not now, will there be in the future?**

A: If the undersized culverts are causing flooding problems, we encourage you to visit our [Community Flood Assistance and Resilience](#) (CFAR) webpage, which has more information about providing support for landowners who need help with flooding issues. Initial technical support and assistance through June 30, 2021 will be focused on flood risks and support for identifying flood damage reduction projects. Chehalis Basin landowners who are interested in replacing undersized culverts on their property to help improve fish passage or access to upstream habitat should contact their local Conservation District or the OCB's Aquatic Species Restoration Plan Program Manager, Nat Kale, at [Nat.Kale@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:Nat.Kale@ecy.wa.gov).

## **THE PROPOSED FLOOD PROTECTION DAM**

**Q: Who has final say as to whether the flood retention facility gets built, and who will own and operate it?**

A: This is a combination of decisions along a multi-step process. Soon, the Chehalis Basin Board will decide whether to continue investing in the project by seeking funding from the Washington State Legislature to do the additional work needed for Ecology and USACE to complete the EIS process. The Board will also decide how much additional funding to request from the legislature for the Flood District to prepare more detailed mitigation plans and possible permit applications. The [Chehalis River Basin Flood Control Zone District](#) is the project applicant, but the decision as to who will operate and maintain the dam has not yet been made. Another step in the process is whether the Washington State Legislature provides additional funding requested by the Board. Eventually, decisions by many federal, state, and local regulatory permitting agencies would be needed before the project could receive final approval to begin construction. To receive permits, the applicant must be able to demonstrate that it is feasible to meet all applicable legal requirements related to mitigating the adverse environmental impacts caused by construction and operation of the project.

**Q: Where does the proposed flood retention facility project currently stand?**

A: Governor Inslee asked the Department of Ecology in summer 2020 to pause the SEPA EIS process through the end of the year. The draft NEPA EIS was released by USACE in fall 2020. The Flood District, as the project proponent, has continued to assess the ability to avoid, reduce, or mitigate the impacts of the dam. The Flood District has also looked at a number of issues that were identified as gaps during the EIS process. The final federal NEPA EIS is currently in development, and the pause on the final state-level SEPA EIS has expired, meaning that the Department of Ecology is currently considering its approach to finalizing the SEPA EIS.

**Q: If the dam is built, sites of significant cultural importance will be inundated. How will this be mitigated?**

A: The impacts of the dam on cultural resources and traditional cultural properties are currently being discussed by the applicant, the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, the Quinault Indian Nation, other interested tribes, and USACE through a formal consultation process. No conclusions have yet been reached about how mitigation for cultural resource impacts might be mitigated.

**Q: Was information regarding timber harvest, terrestrial vegetation, or invasive species analyzed in the EIS? What's being looked at?**

A: Limited information was available for the SEPA and NEPA EISs regarding how timber would be harvested and vegetation managed in the proposed reservoir area. The project proponent recently completed a [refined conceptual vegetation management plan](#) that speaks to the questions about how trees and other vegetation would change in different parts of the reservoir impoundment area as a result of construction and operation of the proposed facility. Invasive species have been a significant focus for [the Aquatic Species Restoration Plan](#).

**Q: What does the science say about the facility's potential impact on salmon habitat, and how is climate change factored into that?**

A: The [SEPA draft EIS and NEPA draft EIS](#) provide information about the facility's potential impact on salmon habitat, though each study took a different approach in its review and assessment. We do know that with or without the facility, climate change threatens the health and existence of aquatic species, especially spring-Chinook, by late-century. More information about the impacts of climate change on aquatic species, especially salmon and steelhead, can be found on [page 19 of the Phase I Aquatic Species Restoration Plan](#).

**Q: What are the key differences between the NEPA and SEPA analysis for this project?**

A: There are several key differences between the federal and state analyses, which were conducted independently and took different approaches. The NEPA-SEPA DEIS Comparison presentation (see the

[September 30, 2020 board work session documents](#)) summarizes the numerous ways in which the analyses differ. In short, there are three key differences:

- The state draft EIS did not separately account for the impacts the project is expected to cause on fisheries from the increasing impacts climate change on salmon and other aquatic species. The federal draft EIS discussed the impacts of climate change separately from the project.
- The state draft EIS findings and conclusions did not consider measures the Flood District could employ to avoid, minimize, or mitigate for the project's adverse environmental impacts. The federal draft EIS was able to consider some avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures identified by the Flood District.
- The state draft EIS evaluated impacts on aquatic species and habitat at a project-area level. The federal draft EIS evaluated these impacts at both the project area and a Basin-wide level.

Neither draft EIS review evaluated the project's net impacts in combination with aquatic species habitat restoration or community-level flood resilience programs.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED FLOOD RETENTION FACILITY**

### **Q: What alternatives are being looked at?**

A: OCB and the Chehalis Basin Board are continuing to look at levees, floodproofing homes and infrastructure, buying properties from willing sellers, land use management, and much more to reduce flood damages and protect communities with or without the proposed flood retention facility. You can read about the many options the Board is currently considering [here](#).

This process has been supported by Local Actions Program technical and implementation/policy advisory groups consisting of experts from local and tribal governments, state agencies, and independent consultants. You can see the many different kinds of ideas and actions the advisory groups have been looking at [here](#).

### **Q: Have you looked at raising I-5 to allow for water flow and fish passage?**

A: Yes, OCB and the Chehalis Basin Board have looked at raising I-5, widening and re-designing it, and building levees or walls to protect key segments of it. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) previously concluded in 2014 that these options were either cost-prohibitive or otherwise unfeasible. You can find the study from WSDOT [here](#). The Board has taken another look at these options as recently as their February 4, 2021 meeting (you can see the WSDOT presentation in materials [here](#)). In the presentation, WSDOT explained why raising I-5 is not a viable solution and also why, whether or not the flood retention facility is built, the agency will pursue smaller, more practical solutions to address flooding on I-5.

**Q: What about restoring the floodplain as a solution to major flooding?**

A: A 2018 examination of large-scale restorative flood protection explored actions that would allow Chehalis River floodwaters to move more naturally over larger, better functioning floodplain areas. The [pilot study](#), conducted in the Newaukum subbasin, concluded that this approach would not significantly slow down or reduce the depth of major flooding downstream in the populated areas of Centralia or Chehalis, nor protect major infrastructure like I-5. The study also concluded there are potentially significant benefits of added flood storage capacity along tributaries, especially smaller tributaries, which could help reduce smaller, localized flooding and improve habitat for aquatic species even if downstream flood damage reduction benefits are nominal.

## **FLOODPLAIN DEVELOPMENT**

**Q: Are counties developing ordinances to stop development in the floodplain?**

A: Counties have regulations that limit development in the floodplain. The Chehalis Basin Board is discussing additional recommendations on development and the impacts of climate change for local governments regarding the issue of future development.

## **FORESTRY AND LOGGING**

**Q: When it comes to land management, what efforts are being made regarding logging practices in the Upper Basin?**

A: Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is conducting an independent and peer-reviewed study to evaluate how contemporary forest practices affect streamflow in the Chehalis Basin. At the conclusion of the study (estimated in 2024), watershed-specific ecohydrology models informed by Basin-specific information will allow managers to understand the effects of patterns associated with forest management, expected changes in land use and impacts to streamflow, and a more thorough understanding of the effects of increased future precipitation to better inform and prioritize projects that may influence local or Basin-scale flooding.

**Q: Where can I find more information regarding the connection between forest harvest practices to hydrology?**

A: In addition to the DNR study mentioned above, the Washington State Forest Practices Board's Cooperative Monitoring, Evaluation and Research (CMER) committee has published scientific studies to inform and support the Forest Practices Adaptive Management program, including, for example, a recent study assessing the effectiveness of experimental riparian buffers in maintaining water quality in forested headwater streams in Western Washington. You can find more information [here](#).

## HABITAT RESTORATION

### **Q: How is the Aquatic Species Restoration Plan (ASRP) related to the flood retention facility?**

A: The ASRP is not mitigation for the proposed flood retention facility. The ASRP is an entirely separate component of the Chehalis Basin Strategy, and is a detailed roadmap for habitat restoration and ecosystem protection along the rivers and streams of the Chehalis Basin. You can read the Board's statement about the relationship between the ASRP and the proposed flood retention facility [here](#).

### **Q: What is being proposed to restore the Wynoochee and Satsop subbasins?**

A: The Wynoochee and Satsop subbasins are two of the high priority areas for miles of aquatic species habitat restoration. You can learn more about the Basin's restoration priorities [here](#).

## COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

### **Q: Who are the agencies and other partners involved in the Chehalis Basin Strategy?**

A: Numerous partners contribute to the Chehalis Basin Strategy. [The Chehalis Basin Board](#) is a diverse group of tribal leaders, local community leaders, and state agency officials. The Board includes two representatives appointed by the governor, three appointed by a consortium of local governments, and two elected tribal council members designated by the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation and the Quinault Indian Nation. State agencies represented on the Board include the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Department of Transportation, Washington State Conservation Commission, and Washington Department of Ecology. The strategy also partners with city and county governments, flood control and port districts, conservation districts and farming organizations, private land trusts, conservation practitioners, and other environmental organizations, among others.

### **Q: How can I stay informed on the latest updates with the Chehalis Basin Strategy?**

A: There are many ways to stay informed! You can [sign up](#) for the Office of Chehalis Basin's email list, follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), and visit our website for updates.

Members of the public can also attend Chehalis Basin Board meetings and provide public comment. Dates and meeting information can be found [here](#).

## STUDIES, ANALYSES, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We encourage you to visit the ["Resources"](#) section of the Chehalis Basin Strategy website, which includes links to publications and scientific analyses, advisory group materials, a GIS Webmap, and more.

All materials from Chehalis Basin Board meetings are available [here](#).

Additional information about the proposed flood protection dam, including the NEPA and SEPA draft EISs (including comments) and the four recent analyses regarding impact minimization and mitigation, can be found on the [Chehalis River Basin Flood Control Zone District's website](#).

You can also reach out to the Office of Chehalis Basin any time for more information at [info@chehalisbasinstrategy.com](mailto:info@chehalisbasinstrategy.com).