

Focus on: Planning for flood risks



Home damage and debris after record-setting floods on the Walla Walla River in Columbia County in 2020.

WHY IT MATTERS



December 2015 flooding on the Skokomish River, Mason County.

Since 1984, local and tribal governments have used state Flood Control Assistance Account (FCAA) funding to help reduce local flood risks.

More information

www.ecology.wa.gov/About-us/How-we-operate/Grants-loans/Find-a-grant-or-loan/Flood-control-assistance

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Restoring community-planning grants reduces flood damages

Almost 37 years ago, the Legislature established the state Flood Control Assistance Account (FCAA) to help local and tribal governments plan for and reduce their flood risks. State law (Chapter 86.26 RCW) requires that \$4 million be transferred every biennium from the state General Fund to FCAA for flood-risk reduction activities. However, for more than a decade, the amount of funding available for local planning grants all but disappeared, as FCAA funds were redirected to address other state needs. Gov. Jay Inslee has included full FCAA funding in his 2021-23 proposed biennial budget. Restoring FCAA funding will give Ecology and its local partners the ability to use FCAA as intended: to prepare for and avoid flood damages. This funding is particularly critical when storms are increasing and sea levels are rising.

The issue

Since the 2009-11 biennium, FCAA appropriations have been significantly reduced and Ecology has had little funding for local flood planning grants. While we received \$250,000 in the 2019-21, operating budget to begin providing emergency grants each biennium, these funds get used up quickly for flood recovery. Restoring FCAA to its full \$4 million appropriation will help local communities proactively prepare for and reduce flood damages. These plans help local and tribal governments:

- Better assess local flood and climate risks and identify resilient-building strategies.
- Develop or update integrated strategies and projects to reduce flood risks while restoring salmon habitat, protecting agricultural lands, and providing other benefits.
- Review and update zoning and land-use options to keep people and infrastructure safe from flood hazards.
- Raise community flood-hazard awareness.

Costs of flooding



May 2018 flooding on the Kettle River in Ferry County.

In Washington, the costs of flooding exceed all other natural hazards. There is better than an 80% chance that 10 or more flood events will happen on any given year in the state, and the frequency of events will increase as the climate changes. Recent research shows that disaster mitigation saves \$6 for every \$1 spent.

ADA Accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6068, email us at ecyadacoordinator@ecy.w.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

The solution

Restoring the flood planning grants program will help communities better understand future flood hazards, and develop comprehensive plans for reducing flood risks. At the restored FCAA funding level, Ecology will be able to fund an estimated 8 to 10 comprehensive flood plans, vulnerability assessments, or project feasibility studies each biennium.

Impacts to residents

Local and tribal governments lead flood hazard reduction efforts in their communities. This work benefits residents and businesses located in or near flood hazard areas. It also benefits public infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and utilities because planning puts them at less risk from flooding. Good flood planning and flood risk reduction helps protect the value of public and private property. In addition, communities completing flood plans will be in a better position to compete for federal and state grants to build better flood resiliency.

Economically distressed communities affected

The lack of flood planning funds has disproportionately impacted economically distressed rural communities. Emerging research shows that Latino and Native American communities are more exposed to flooding. For example, research estimates while Latino residents make up 8% percent of Washington's total population, they comprise 16% of those living in flood zones. Tribal communities employ more than 37,000 state residents and generate \$5.7 billion to Washington's economy. They also occupy flood risk areas that would directly benefit from flood planning. Updated flood plans that sustain and enhance salmon habitat also help address tribal treaty rights.

Save money, protect the environment

Proactive flood planning helps keep people and properties out of harm's way and reduces economic losses for communities and the state. Flood risk reduction actions help reduce emergency response costs, which are often four to seven times higher than the cost of preventative measures. Good, integrated flood planning also helps preserve and protect salmon and important habitat areas.



Engineered levy and logjams, resulting from good flood planning, are helping lower flood-related damages for the Pierce County town of Orting.