New entities keep Chehalis Basin Strategy on track

For more information

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Special accommodations

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Figure 1: Andrea McNamara Doyle

New entities moving Chehalis Basin Strategy forward

Local, tribal, and state leaders are developing the Chehalis Basin Strategy, a collection of potential near- and long-term actions, and small- and large-scale projects designed to reduce flood-related damages while restoring aquatic species habitat in the Chehalis River Basin. To fund and implement the Strategy, the 2016 Washington Legislature created an independent Chehalis Basin Board (Board) and established a new Office of Chehalis Basin (OCB) within the state Department of Ecology and. Both became operational in July 2017.

Board carries out Strategy, recommends funding

Typically meeting the first Thursday of every month, the seven-member Board implements the Strategy and makes budget recommendations to the Governor. Dave Burnett represents the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation and Tyson Johnston represents the Quinault Indian Nation on the Board. Gov. Inslee appointed J. Vander Stoep and Steve Malloch to serve on the Board while the Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority selected Edna Fund, Jay Gordon, and Board Chair Vickie Raines. Meeting agendas, presentations, and other documents are at: www.ezview.wa.gov/site/alias__1962/committees_chehalis_basin_board/37068/chehalis_basin_board.aspx

There are also five non-voting Board members representing the state departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources, Transportation, and Washington Conservation Commission.

McNamara Doyle leads Office of Chehalis Basin

The Office of Chehalis Basin administers state and federal funding to implement the Strategy and provides staff support to the Board. In April 2018, Andrea McNamara Doyle was selected to be the first OCB Director. Before coming to Ecology, Andrea served as executive director for the Washington Wildlife & Recreation Coalition and was also former executive director for the Washington Public Disclosure Commission and director of the state Environmental Hearings Office.

Chehalis Basin Strategy

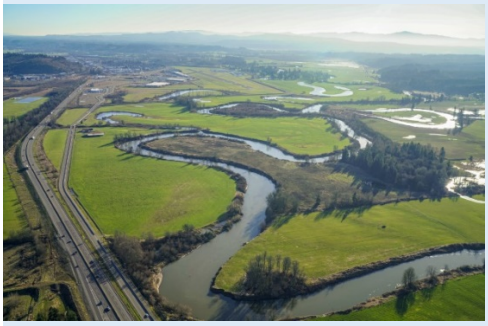

Figure 2: Chehalis River Basin

Figure 3: U.S. Interstate 5 near Centralia during December 2007 flood

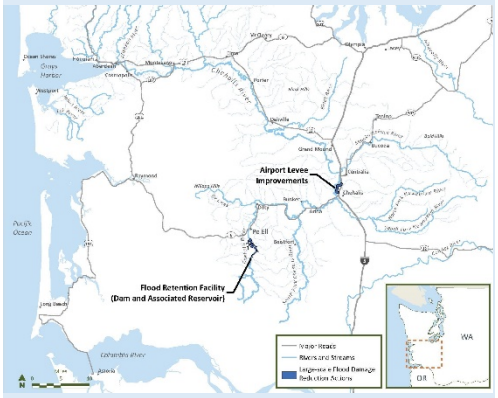

Figure 4: Location of proposed Chehalis River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Project

Strategy actions being considered

The Chehalis Basin Strategy has two overarching goals: reduce flood-related damages while restoring aquatic habitat in the Chehalis Basin. While most flood damage reduction projects are being done or planned at the local level, there are several large-scale, basin-wide actions under consideration. The primary Strategy actions being studied are below.

Habitat Restoration Actions	Local Flood Damage Reduction Actions	Large-Scale Flood Damage Reduction Actions
Restore about 200 miles of riverside habitat by: • Improving river habitat. • Restoring river banks by planting native vegetation. • Removing and improving fish passage barriers. • Reconnecting the floodplain.	**Local actions include:** • Installing farm pads. • Raising structures, building floodways, and making buyouts. • Flood-proofing buildings. • Improving land use management. • Taking integrated early actions.	**Large-scale actions include:** • Proposed Chehalis River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Project. • Community Flood Protection Program. • Projects to protect regional transportation corridors.

EIS for proposed Chehalis River Basin project

To reduce flood-related damages in the Basin, the Chehalis River Basin Flood Control Zone District is proposing to construct a new flood retention facility near Pe Ell—consisting of a dam and temporary reservoir—and raising parts of the Chehalis-Centralia Airport levee.

Ecology and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will use the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process to evaluate likely impacts from the District's proposed Chehalis River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Project. Ecology will use the State Environmental Policy Act to prepare an EIS while USACE will complete a separate EIS under the National Environmental Policy Act. Each EIS will evaluate likely impacts, project alternatives, and mitigation approaches.

The first step in the EIS process is scoping. The public scoping period for the project proposal will be held from Sept. 28 through Oct. 29, 2018. The public can learn more details about the project and state and federal environmental review process as well as submit comments about the scope of what each EIS should evaluate, including probable impacts, possible alternatives and mitigation measures. No permit decisions can be made until after the final EIS is issued.

The public will be able to submit written scoping comments online or by U.S. mail. The agencies will also hold two scoping meetings in October to take comments from the public:

- **Montesano:** Oct. 16, from 5 to 8 p.m. at Montesano City Hall, 112 N. Main St.
- **Centralia:** Oct. 17, from 5 to 8 p.m. at Centralia College, Bowman Rotary Banquet Rooms A & B, 600 Centralia College Boulevard.

Building flood resiliency

The Flood Authority maintains a state-of-the-art flood warning system so citizens and responders can take early actions during a flood. In four years, there's been a 158 percent jump in email alert signups.

Bucoda wellhead levee

Figure 5: Bucoda wellhead project sign

Bucoda completed a $309,000 project in 2014 extending and raising the levee around the town's existing wellhead and drinking water system.

Pe Ell flood prevention dike

Figure 6: Flood prevention dike along Pe Ell's wastewater treatment plant.

Pe Ell completed a $521,000 project in 2015 to build a 900 foot-long dike along the town's wastewater treatment plant. The top of the dike is two feet higher than the water level reached during the December 2007 flood.

Local flood damage reduction projects

The Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority (Flood Authority) meets monthly and includes representatives from 10 Basin towns and cities and Grays Harbor, Lewis, and Thurston counties. The Flood Authority prioritizes and oversees local flood-damage reduction projects and works with local governments on floodplain management regulations. The Flood Authority also advises the Board on these issues.

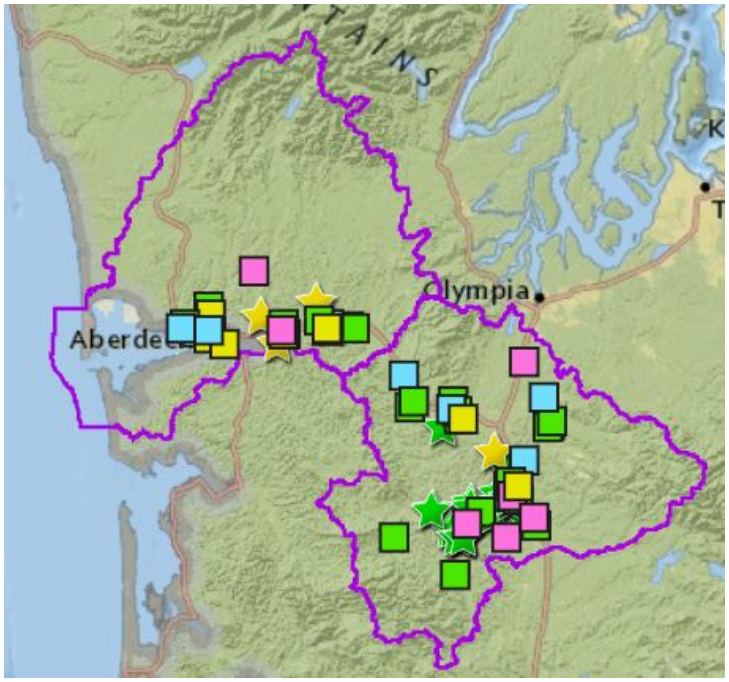

Figure 7: Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority's new interactive map showing various flood-damage reduction projects in the Basin.

Since 2012, the Flood Authority has invested nearly $41 million in Basin flood-damage reduction projects, including:

- $16.3 million to complete 24 projects.
- $24 million to finish another 15 projects now underway.

Local governments have invested another $12 million for the projects.

The Flood Authority has a new interactive map with more details about the flood damage reduction projects. To find the map, go to www.ezview.wa.gov/site/alias__1492/33948/home.aspx. Click on the "Local Projects" tab on the top menu. The interactive map link is number three under the "Active Projects" header.

The Flood Authority also has invested another $740,000 to establish evacuation routes and install reusable farm pads at 22 locations in the Basin, and this work continues at four more locations. The farm pads and evacuation routes help prevent losses to agricultural operations including livestock, farm equipment, and structures.

What's next?

Figure 8: These Bush Creek barrier culverts are being replaced.

In 2018 and 2019, the ASRP will designate large-scale aquatic habitat restoration projects in five Chehalis River sub-basins:

- Newaukum
- Satsop
- South Fork Chehalis
- Skookumchuck
- Wynoochee

Figure 9: Fishing on the Wynoochee River.

These sub-basins were selected through a rigorous scientific process, and were picked because habitat restoration actions are most likely to result in increased salmon populations.

All habitat restoration projects in these sub-basins will be developed in partnership with willing landowners and in stream reaches with the highest likely salmon benefits.

Restoring aquatic habitat in the Basin

The Chehalis River Basin is Washington's only major watershed without any federally-listed endangered salmon species—but fish are still in trouble. The Basin's coastal wild salmon runs, for instance, are only 10 percent of what they were 100 years ago.

To protect and restore up to 200 miles of Basin riverside habitat, local, tribal, and state officials continue to develop and refine the Chehalis Basin Aquatic Species Restoration Plan (ASRP).

The ASRP helps support Basin habitat functions, ecosystem processes, and boosting populations of fish and semi-aquatic species while creating flood and climate-resilient systems that support human needs. Already, a variety projects have been completed or underway to improve aquatic habitat.

In 2018, the state—working with habitat groups and local governments—invested $4 million to redesign or reconstruct 17 barrier culverts so migrating fish can reach another 32.5 miles of Basin stream habitat in Grays Harbor and Lewis counties.

Grays Harbor County projects restore habitat

In Grays Harbor County, improvements overseen by the Chehalis Basin Fisheries Task Force is opening 15 miles of habitat areas in Bush, Geissler, and Sand creeks, while the Grays Harbor Conservation District is opening 4.1 miles of a Chehalis River tributary flowing under a farm crossing near Oakville.

Opening 13 miles of habitat in Lewis County

In Lewis County, projects will open 13 miles of habitat in Berwick, Frase, and Prairie creeks. The Port of Chehalis and Lewis County Conservation District are improving culverts so fish can access 4.7 miles of Berwick Creek while Lewis County is replacing culverts and realigning stream channels to open 3.5 miles of Frase Creek and 4.9 miles of Prairie Creek.

Projects improve habitat, offer multiple benefits

The 2018 investments build on habitat improvement work the Strategy guided from 2015 through 2017—including making a $5.6 million investment to open fish access to nearly 65 miles in the Basin and make other improvements.

Projects that restore aquatic habitat, especially improving culverts and stream channels, can have a dual benefit because fish access barriers and stream channel problems can also temporarily back up water, causing transportation corridors and private lands to be flooded.