

## Focus on: Floodplains by Design project reappropriations



*An engineered log jam being installed on the new Calistoga levee at Orting in Pierce County.*

### Floodplains by Design

Our competitive FbD grant program—done in partnership with The Nature Conservancy—was launched in 2013 to realize improved outcomes for river floodplains. Local and tribal governments and nonprofit organizations use FbD grants to complete multi-benefit projects that help reduce community flood risks, restore natural floodplain functions, and recover aquatic habitat.

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### ADA Accessibility

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### Floodplains by Design lowers flood risks, helps salmon

Since the Floodplains by Design (FbD) program started, the Washington Legislature has appropriated \$165 million to fund 45 integrated FbD projects. These large, complex projects often contain several separate but connected components such as constructing set-back levees, making land acquisitions, and restoring aquatic habitat. As of December 2020, FbD projects have reconnected over 7,200 acres of floodplains, permanently protected more than 1,330 acres of farmland, restored over 49 miles of salmon habitat, and reduced flood risks to over 2,200 homes and structures in 59 Washington communities. In addition, for every \$1 million invested in restoration programs such as FbD, it is estimated almost 17 new jobs are created.

### Reappropriations built into FbD grant program

We expect some amount of reappropriation request every fund cycle. This is because FbD grants by their nature are large, complex transformative projects. For participants to initially commit, they need assurance they can receive full funding to complete their projects. Grants are typically written to be completed in three to four years, which explains some of the reappropriation rates (Table 1).

When entities apply for FbD grants, they provide a rough project timeline and an ideal schedule. Since FbD projects are located in environmentally sensitive areas with narrow work windows to reduce impacts to salmon, delays are common. Similar to other large public capital funding projects, many FbD projects cannot be completed in the two-year budget cycle. At the end of the 2017-19 biennium, \$53.6 million was reappropriated to the current biennium. As of December 2020, 99% of the reappropriations are spent (70%) or under contract (30%).

## FbD project delays



*Cedar River flooding threatening mobile home park. The homes were purchased and removed, while the floodplain was reconnected.*

When a few large projects are delayed, it can skew the reappropriation rate for the entire FbD program. Here are some examples:

**Clallam County Dungeness levee setback project** (\$9 million 2015 grant award) was severely affected when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers withdrew previously committed funds. The project had to come up with other funding sources and create a new schedule.

**Yakima County Nelson Dam/Rambler's Park complex project** (\$2.1 million in 2015; \$5.5 million in 2017) underwent a major shift in project scope due to changes requested by stakeholders and federal partners, and new funding.

**King County Riverbend construction project** (\$7.3 million in 2017) was delayed after a major flood event on the river blew out the old levee before work could begin replacing it. The project is being re-scoped and slated to be done by December 2022.

**Mason County Skokomish project** (\$6.8 million in 2017) has been delayed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, causing the completion timeline to be rewritten. The project is back on track.

**Table 1: FbD project reappropriation figures**

Biennium	Original amount (millions)	2015-17 Reappropriation (millions)	2017-19 Reappropriation (millions)	2019-21 Reappropriation (millions)
2013-15	\$50.0 <sup>1</sup>	\$31.5 (63%)	\$15.3 (31%)	\$1.4 (3%)
2015-17	\$35.5	N/A	\$31.1 (88%)	\$19.1 (54%)
2017-19	\$35.4	N/A	N/A	\$33.1 (93%)
2019-21	\$50.4	N/A	N/A	N/A

<sup>1</sup>This initial appropriation included two projects that were not FbD projects: the \$5 million Mount Vernon Protection Project and \$750,000 Prairie Creek Drainage Improvements project. These costs were not included in the \$165 million figure shared on page 1 of this document.

## Why some FbD projects have been slow to spend

Some FbD projects have been slower to spend their award than expected. The reasons are as varied as the projects. The one-year delay in adopting the 2017-19 biennium capital budget resulted in significant delays for those dollars (biennial capital budget passed during 2018 session – nearly one year into the biennium). Even small project delays can result in work windows being missed, which can delay projects by a year. Project delays can occur when federal partners withdraw funding late in the grant cycle, critical property acquisitions fall through, on-the-ground conditions change, or permitting requirements drive design modifications.

In addition, state and local budget delays and spending freezes, coupled with responding to the COVID-19 global pandemic have or are likely to affect FbD project schedules.

## How we're addressing slow FbD program spending

Beginning with our 2017-19 appropriation request, we improved the project evaluation and grant selection process to consider only projects that are ready to proceed and completed within two to three years. For the \$70 million included in the Governor's 2021-23 capital budget, we are continuing with this same criterion. We also are actively working with local floodplain managers and private sector partners to evaluate the funding program and find ways to help expedite spending. This includes:

- Evaluating the option of adopting procedures that put large scale, multi-biennia projects into a portfolio of projects to be completed over time.
- Identifying and working to reduce permit process challenges and other obstacles.