

June 02, 2021

Chehalis Basin Board
c/o Andrea McNamara Doyle
Office of Chehalis Basin Director

RE: Chehalis Basin Strategy 2021-2023 Draft Biennium Budget Comments

Chehalis Basin Board Members,

We are writing to inform you of our organizations' support for the development of a comprehensive basin-wide flood damage reduction plan.

We have been engaged in the Chehalis Basin Strategy (CBS) process since the beginning and our members have participated in the development of both the Aquatic Species Restoration Plan (ASRP) and the push for the development of a Local Actions Program. Overall, we have been appreciative and thankful for the opportunity to have our voices brought to the table around such an important matter. Furthermore, the work thus far from the Office of the Chehalis Basin (OCB), agencies, Tribes and contractors has been an unprecedented undertaking and has the potential to become one of the most comprehensive watershed restoration strategies implemented in Washington State and set an important national example. OCB has successfully completed over 1,000 studies moving the Chehalis Basin from one of the most data poor watersheds in the state to one of the most data rich.

The following 4 examples highlight some of this work:

1. Developed updated flood modeling that we did not have in 2007 and 2009.
2. Modeled climate change predictions that allow us to understand the long-term challenges we must address.
3. A deeper understanding of the impact that flooding has on our communities and agricultural lands throughout the Basin.
4. Multiple environmental studies that communicate the complex issues and precarious position of the aquatic species in the Basin.

While ongoing analysis will be necessary, we now have enough information to make informed planning decisions for the entire Basin.

Data collection, planning, and a collaborative governance structure has allowed the aquatic species side of the CBS to develop the Aquatic Species Restoration Plan (ASRP) - a comprehensive plan to restore and protect aquatic species habitat throughout the basin. The ASRP is now shifting towards prioritization and largescale basin-wide implementation with broad and diverse consensus amongst partners.

Conversely, the flood damage reduction side of the CBS has to date, been less organized and strategic in its approach to basin-wide flood damage reduction and does not have a comprehensive plan. Flood damage reduction actions have been individual proposals promoted from separate programs - each with their own management and project development structure. This has resulted in a lost opportunity for comprehensive risk/benefit analysis, prioritization and synergy with other flood damage reduction projects or other components of the CBS. It is

also not very cost affective. This lack of synergy is evident in the numerous, isolated flood damage reduction programs and proposals, all without an analysis of the overall alignment with the CBS. Projects include:

- The proposed dam
- Capital Projects
- Flood Authority Local Projects
- Flood Warning & Emergency Response System
- Community Flood Assistance and Resilience Program (CFAR)
- Proposed Integrated Actions

Our organizations believe the development of a comprehensive basin-wide plan is essential to achieving the dual objectives of the CBS. Having participated in the development of the Local Actions Program (LAP) planning this past year, we understand that there is no silver bullet to the complex goal of flood damage reduction within the Chehalis Basin. Instead, there is an array of structural and non-structural flood damage reduction options that when designed together, as part of a larger plan, could reduce flood damage throughout the basin.

Addressing land use change regulations and developing an acquisition strategy are critical components of a comprehensive plan but addressing them individually perpetuates a siloed approach that does not effectively leverage the resources and political support for the CBS.

Furthermore, it is imperative that flood damage reduction projects currently under development or being considered for funding are not considered as the LAP that Basin Tribes and others have been calling for since the initiation of this process. Flood authority projects like preplanned levees, are not a part of a holistic, strategic, and prioritized integrated local actions program.

We are calling on the OCB and Chehalis Basin Board to develop a comprehensive basin-wide flood damage reduction plan that will serve as the roadmap for strategic investments and help prioritize implementation in the future. It is essential that we invest enough in this biennium's budget to develop such a plan.

Development of the plan will provide a number of benefits to the CBS:

- It will allow us to have a comprehensive understanding of the level of effort needed to reduce flood damage throughout the basin.
- It will help prioritize future capital projects.
- It will provide local communities with needed resources to protect their communities and incentivize new economic growth on higher ground.
- Once priorities/projects are in the plan, they will have funding security through sustained state investment, relieving budgetary constraints on the local jurisdictions and allowing them to make informed long term planning decisions.
- It will increase integration across CBS programs, leading to more multi-benefit projects and efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

To effectively develop this plan in an unbiased and transparent manor, we recommend the flood damage reduction program adopt a new governance structure similar to the ASRP. This new structure will leverage the successes of the Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority while adding much needed capacity and organization to advance flood damage reduction at a basin-scale. It will also ensure that future projects align with common community values and will reduce the

potential for strong opposition to specific projects – ultimately leading to a smoother planning and implementation process.

As the Chehalis Basin Board considers their budget priorities for the coming biennium, we recommend:

1. Creation of a Steering Committee to guide and coordinate different elements of the flood damage reduction program.
2. Development of a Basin-wide Planning and Implementation Team to produce and execute a comprehensive basin-wide flood damage reduction plan that includes prioritized projects.
3. Creation of a Science and Engineering Group to support the comprehensive flood damage reduction plan with the best available science and technical review, that includes overlap with the ASRP to ensure synergy across efforts.

This biennium provides a critical opportunity for CBS to take a meaningful step towards fulfilling its mission to aggressively pursue implementation of an integrated Strategy for long-term flood damage reduction and aquatic species restoration in the Chehalis River Basin. Our recommendations are intended to support the dual goals of the CBS and provide the board members with constructive ideas to improve the effectiveness of this program.

We appreciate your consideration, and we stand ready support the Chehalis Basin Board and Strategy over the next two-years.

Sincerely,

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