

TALKING POINTS - LEGISLATIVE OUTREACH

Date: June 17, 2024

Re: REVISED Talking Points for Legislative Outreach

High-Level Talking Points

1. We're community leaders, farmers and landowners, local residents, business owners, and local, state, and Tribal government officials who are committed to working together. We share a vision of protecting people from catastrophic flooding and restoring salmon and other aquatic life, and we know consensus is the only way to reach our goals.

- This diligent collaboration is why we've been able to accomplish an incredible amount already with our partners, and it is how we are now nearing the culmination of years of dedication to design a large-scale, forward-thinking Chehalis Basin Strategy to protect the Basin for future generations.
- An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We believe that by working collaboratively now, we can avoid the exponential costs and conflicts that come with catastrophic flood damages, devastated habitat, and extinct salmon and steelhead.

2. The Chehalis Basin is home to some of the state's most important industries, transportation corridors, and aquatic life. Our work here will benefit everyone in Washington and beyond.

- Unlike other more developed areas of Washington, the Chehalis Basin offers opportunities for the state to wisely invest in proactive salmon habitat protection. By investing now in habitat measures in a relatively intact region, Washington's resources can go further and be used more effectively than in other regions where investments must focus on undoing serious existing environmental damages.
- U.S. Interstate 5, the key transportation corridor from Canada to Mexico, is the West Coast's main channel for commerce, food supplies and public health, and it runs directly through the Chehalis Basin and its floodplains. Protecting the roadway from catastrophic flood damage benefits not just Washington, but the entire West Coast.

3. We've accomplished a lot together in seven years, with 140+ projects already on-the-ground and making a difference for people and aquatic life all across the Chehalis Basin.

- Projects are already translating to real results – from **protecting almost 300 acres habitat and 360 acres of floodplain habitat for salmon** and other aquatic life, to

supporting 700 local jobs, and protecting numerous homes and community infrastructure from flood damage.

- We have a track record of using investments wisely. We've completed projects on time and on budget, with high returns on investment.
- We bring together the many people and jurisdictions who are already restoring aquatic life and protecting against flood damage, and we identify gaps and where people can work together for greater and smart impact than we could achieve alone.

4. This year, we've already made huge strides and reached consensus on the common elements that will be the foundation of the long-term Strategy. With these important agreements in place, we are on track to finalize and release the long-term Strategy in early 2026.

- The state's support and investment are crucial now more than ever to ensure this momentum continues and the Strategy's full potential is realized.

5. Right now, essential analysis is underway for some of the key projects being considered for the long-term Strategy. When these final evaluations are complete, we will be able to make fully informed deliberations to agree on and release the long-term Strategy.

- Specifically, this analysis is focused on the future of the Skookumchuck Dam; projected outcomes from the Local Actions Non-Dam Alternative effort; and the state and federal environmental impact statements for the proposed flow-through dam for flood control on the Chehalis River.

Additional History & Context

The state of Washington created the Chehalis Basin Strategy in 2011 to tackle two connected goals: reversing the decline of salmon and other aquatic life and protecting communities from major flood damage.

- The Chehalis Basin Strategy uses an integrated approach to address both of these connected challenges at the same time.
- What's now called the Chehalis Basin Strategy initially operated as a work group established by former Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire after the 2007 and 2009 floods. Then, in 2016, the Washington Legislature officially created the Office of Chehalis Basin and Chehalis Basin Board as part of the state Department of Ecology.
- The Office of Chehalis Basin was created to "aggressively pursue implementation of an integrated Strategy for long-term flood damage reduction and aquatic species restoration in the Chehalis River Basin."
- Before the Strategy was established, local and regional experts were helping build a foundation of scientific research and analysis on flood damage reduction and habitat restoration, but there were important gaps in our understanding of the Basin's hydrology and its relationship with the natural ecosystem and the built environment.

The Chehalis Basin Strategy is led by a group of representatives with diverse interests and perspectives called the Chehalis Basin Board and is administered and funded through the Washington Department of Ecology's Office of Chehalis Basin. It depends on partners and collaborators across the Chehalis Basin and the state to inform the path forward and take projects from ideas to reality.

- The Chehalis Basin Board consists of seven voting members representing the Quinault Indian Nation; the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation; the Basin's local flood authority; agricultural, environmental, and other community interests; and five ex-officio members representing state agencies.

While flooding is a natural part of life in the Chehalis Basin, climate change is magnifying its severity. Floods so large that they only happened once every hundred years could happen as frequently as once per decade by the end of the century, putting residents in greater danger of losing homes, livelihoods, and lives. It will become increasingly difficult for communities to rebuild between disasters, especially for residents with limited recovery resources.

- Six of the largest floods in recorded history in the Basin have occurred within the last 35 years.

- The recent catastrophic floods in 2007 caused \$938 million in local and statewide damage¹ and shut down entire segments of I-5 for days, impacting travel and commerce far beyond the Basin.
- Coastal communities in the Basin also face worsening flooding from rising sea levels. When major flooding coincides with higher than average king tides, as occurred in January 2022, the conditions can be particularly dangerous for residents living in coastal Grays Harbor County.

Salmon, whose habitats have been badly damaged for decades, will not be able to survive in increasingly hot water temperatures if action isn't taken now. Scientists, researchers and technical specialists say that, if no action is taken to preserve aquatic life in the Basin, spring Chinook salmon could be lost entirely in 60 years. A significant percent of the economically vital steelhead runs could disappear in that same period.

- Spring 2021 was the second driest on record since 1895. The summer's heat waves, and lack of rain led to water temperatures as high as 88 degrees Fahrenheit in parts of the Basin. To put that in perspective, salmon are a cold-water species and begin to experience stress at 64.4 degrees Fahrenheit.
- In the upper Basin, salmon and steelhead populations will be at less than half of their current levels – a predicted drop by 70 percent – if we do not implement aggressive protection and restoration.

¹ Source : <https://www.ezview.wa.gov/Portals/1492/images/default/DRAFT%20Chehalis%20River%20Basin%20Flood%20District%20Formation%20Study.pdf>