

February 07, 2012 – The Daily World

A word from Flood Authority leaders

Reader Opinion by Vickie L. Raines & Karen Valenzuela

As the Chair and Vice Chair of the Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority, we are writing to follow up on recent stories related to the town of Bucoda's withdrawal from the Flood Authority, and the Anchor QEA Fisheries Impact Study.

The Flood Authority is charged with working basin-wide to find solutions to alleviate the impact of flooding, particularly catastrophic flooding. As readers are aware, the Chehalis Basin regularly experiences flooding ranging from the high water events of the last few months, to the devastating and catastrophic flood of 2007. There are not any easy answers to addressing these important events.

In September 2011, the Flood Authority adopted a work plan to finish several on-going studies, including looking at the potential impacts of a dam on Chehalis River fish species. At the same time, the Flood Authority is working closely with the Washington State Office of Financial Management on a report looking at a variety of alternative approaches and projects to addressing flooding. This report, when finished early this summer, will also recommend concrete next steps for moving forward. The Flood Authority has been reaching out to local communities throughout the Chehalis River Basin by holding its meetings in various locations and taking tours of local areas affected by flooding. In addition, the Flood Authority hosted the House Capital Budget Committee for an upper basin tour in October 2011.

Internally, we have been working hard to build a better working relationship among Flood Authority members. Despite the diverse points of view and concerns represented by the Flood Authority members, we are committed to working together to find common ground. We will be the first to admit that this is a work in progress.

We were dismayed when we received word from the town of Bucoda of its council's vote to withdraw from the Flood Authority. We respect Bucoda's decision, but welcome the town back at any point. Both of us have followed up with Bucoda officials and let them know that regardless of whether Bucoda is a member of the Flood Authority or not, we would be working to address the impact of flooding in their area. At the meeting last week, the Flood Authority authorized additional survey work to refine and more fully develop the hydraulic model on the Skookumchuck River. Our consultant met with Mayor Alan Carr on Tuesday this week, and the survey work is under way. We look forward to further discussions with Bucoda, as well as with other jurisdictions throughout the Basin affected by flooding.

There have also been critical articles published about the Anchor QEA Fisheries Impact Study. As mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to examine the potential impact on fish if a dam were built on the Mainstem Chehalis River above Pe Ell. Anchor QEA released a draft of this report in November for public review and comment, and received a number of comments back. We were happy to receive such constructive feedback, including positive feedback as well. Anchor QEA is working with each of these comments now. The feedback received will help shape the final report. We greatly look forward to the final report in March.

Vickie L. Raines is chairwoman of the Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority, mayor of Cosmopolis and represents the City of Montesano on the Flood Authority.

Karen Valenzuela is Vice-Chairwoman of the Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority and a county commissioner for Thurston County.