



STATE OF WASHINGTON

February 15, 2012

Vickie Raines, Chair
Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority

Dear Mayor Raines,

The members of the Chehalis Flood State Team continue to be interested and engaged in the important work underway by the Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority. In particular, we are supportive of the effort that Anchor QEA are currently performing to address the comments provided on the draft Chehalis River Fisheries Impact Study document, and to make the appropriate revisions to their analysis and to the report. In light of the significance of this effort, and the considerable interest by the public in the conduct and results of the study, we'd like to offer the attached observations and statements for your consideration.

It's our hope that this information can help clarify the position of state agencies and their staff with respect to this work and your efforts. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

John P. Donahue
On behalf of The Chehalis Flood State Team

Chehalis Fisheries Impact Study – State Team update

Background

The Chehalis River Fisheries Impact Study is in draft form and is currently under revision

The Chehalis River Fisheries Impact Study and resulting report are the culmination of over 18 month's effort focusing on baseline conditions and the effects on the fisheries resource of the proposal to build a water retention structure in the main stem Chehalis River. The report was compiled by Anchor QEA of Seattle based on field observations and computer modeling of various project conditions. A draft version of the report was released to the Flood Authority, state agencies, and the public on November 17, 2011. The draft release was then followed by a comment period which ended on January 9, 2012. During the comment period, Anchor QEA conducted a "Data Transfer" workshop that provided an opportunity for questions and discussion about the study approach, assumptions, method, and report details, and WSDOT, Ecology, and WDFW staff all participated in this event. Anchor QEA is currently considering over 400 comments from various agencies, tribes, and the public, and will revise the report accordingly.

Progress

A number of comments made by state agencies about the Chehalis River Fisheries Impact Study are significant, and Anchor QEA is working right now to address them

In their comments, state agencies identified a number of areas of specific concern associated with the study, and in certain cases these concerns represent significant technical disagreements that need to be resolved. These disagreements include concerns related to estimates about the 2007 flood at the Doty gauge, model uncertainty related to the limited water temperature observations performed by the study team, assumptions used in the model about spawning behavior and juvenile salmonid migration survival, calculations related to the elevation, temperature regime, and oxygen demand of the reservoir, and the impact of a dam on channel forming and sediment transport processes. As Anchor QEA works through these comments and the issues they represent, they have already acknowledged that some rework of their original analysis, and reconsideration of their conclusions, will be necessary.

Going forward

State agencies have made no decisions or recommendations about flood risk reduction in the Chehalis Basin. As the Chehalis River Fisheries Impact Study concludes, it will become an important part of state agency understanding about water retention, contributing to their ability to formulate recommendations, and to be responsive to the legislature

Work on the Chehalis River Fisheries Impact Study continues towards a final report. As Anchor QEA prepares for this next release, state agencies are committed to supporting a process of reviewing new information, and preparing additional technical comments, in order to support further dialog about the science. State agencies support the Flood Authority's efforts to provide sufficient time and resources so that Anchor QEA can participate with agencies and the public in this dialog. Towards that end, the Washington State Office of Financial Management has agreed to provide \$40,000 to help fund that effort. We believe that this technical wrap up, based on the science, is a critical part of the study process.

Meanwhile, state agencies have made no decisions or recommendations regarding the future flood reduction in the Chehalis Basin. In 2011, the legislature asked state agencies, as part of ESHB 2020 Section 1033, to report back to them on questions about flood damage reduction solutions in the Chehalis Basin, including water retention, levees, and other alternatives. In the near future, state agency staff will also be participating with OFM, the Ruckelshaus Center, the Flood Authority, and others in the development and consideration of recommendations to the legislature about future flood reduction efforts.