

Focus on: EIS for proposed Chehalis River project



Figure 1: The Chehalis River basin, the state's second-largest river system, covers nearly 2,700 square miles of southwest Washington.

EIS scoping meetings

Ecology and USACE will hold two public EIS scoping meetings in October. Find out more about the District's proposed project, environmental review process, and share comments about the scope of each EIS. The open house-style events will be held from 5 to 8 p.m. at the following locations and dates:

- **Montesano:** Oct. 16, Montesano City Hall 112 N. Main St.
- **Centralia:** Oct. 17, Centralia College, Bowman Rotary Banquet Rooms A & B, 600 Centralia College Boulevard.

For more project information, how to provide EIS comments, and sign up for updates, go to:

www.chehalisbasinstrategy.com

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Environmental review begins for Chehalis River project

To tackle flood-related issues from the Chehalis River, the Chehalis River Basin Flood Control Zone District (District) is proposing to construct a new Flood Retention Facility near Pe Ell in Lewis County—consisting of a dam and temporary reservoir—and raising parts of the Chehalis-Centralia Airport levee.

To help inform decision-makers about the next steps for reviewing the proposed project to reduce damages from major floods in parts of the Chehalis basin, the state Department of Ecology (Ecology) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) are using the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process to assess probable environmental impacts and related issues.

Ecology will prepare an EIS under the State Environmental Policy Act and USACE will prepare a separate EIS under the National Environmental Policy Act. Each EIS will evaluate probable impacts the proposed project could have on the environment, examine project alternatives, and assess ways to offset potential adverse effects.

EIS scoping starts Sept. 28, 2018

Scoping is the first step in the state and federal EIS process. From Sept. 28 through Oct. 29, 2018, Ecology and USACE will open the public scoping comment period for the District's proposed project.

Both review agencies will begin accepting public scoping comments starting Sept. 28. On that date, we will also provide information how the public can submit their comments using an online form, by mail, or at the public scoping meetings in October. We can only consider the comments we receive during the 31-day scoping comment period.

Chehalis basin: A vital asset

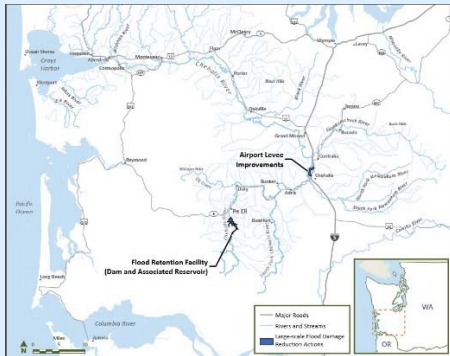


Figure 2: Proposed Chehalis River flood-damage reduction project.



Figure 3: Bank erosion along Chehalis River.



Figure 4: Fall fishing in the Wynoochee River.

Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodation including materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 360-407-7668 or visit

<https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>

People with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. People with speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.

Public comments during EIS scoping are crucial

During scoping, the public can learn more details about the project and environmental review process. Scoping also gives the public an opportunity to comment about the range of potential impacts and possible alternatives that should be analyzed in the EIS evaluation.

During scoping, the public is invited to submit comments on the scope of what each state and federal EIS should evaluate, related to:

- Project alternatives
- Likely adverse impacts
- Potential mitigation measures
- Permits, licenses or other approvals that may be required

Public input during scoping will help Ecology and USACE determine the extent of the environmental review for the project. After the EIS scoping period ends, each lead review agency will issue a scoping summary and begin work on its draft EIS.

Scoping will not address whether the proposed project should receive permits or other approvals. Under both the state and federal EIS process, no permit decisions can be made until after the final EIS is issued.

Connection to Chehalis Basin Strategy

Local, tribal and state leaders are developing the Chehalis Basin Strategy—an integrated approach to reduce damages from major floods while improving aquatic species habitat in the Chehalis River basin. The Strategy helps address these goals through near- and long-term actions as well as small- and large-scale projects.

Under SEPA, an evaluation is required—with some exemptions—for proposed actions that could have significant environmental impacts. In 2017, Ecology completed a “programmatic” EIS for the Chehalis Basin Strategy. That EIS assessed broad issues and actions for addressing both flooding and aquatic species. It evaluated potential environmental impacts and alternatives broadly, and included an assessment of different types of water retention facilities, levee improvements, and other potential large-scale Strategy actions.

For the District’s proposed Chehalis River Basin Flood Damage Reduction project, we and the USACE will each develop a new “project” EIS. The environmental evaluations under SEPA and NEPA for the proposed dam and levee improvements will be separate from the earlier programmatic EIS.

However, Ecology will likely use data from the 2017 Strategy EIS as a baseline for the Basin’s proposed project, and information will be supplemented, as needed, to help evaluate potential environmental impacts.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is there a difference between the environmental review of the District's proposed flood Damage reduction project and the 2017 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Chehalis Basin Strategy?

Under the State Environmental Policy Act, an evaluation is required for actions that could potentially have significant impacts to the environment. In 2017, we completed a "programmatic" EIS for the Chehalis Basin Strategy that assessed broad issues and actions for addressing both flooding and aquatic species—including evaluating water retention facilities, levee improvements and other potential large-scale actions. However, for the District's proposed flood damage reduction project, we and the USACE will each develop a new "project" EIS that will be separate from the 2017 Strategy EIS. We will likely use data from the earlier EIS as a baseline to help evaluate the project's potential environmental impacts.

Q: Why is Ecology and USACE each developing an EIS for the District's proposed project?

As the lead state and federal environmental review agencies, Ecology and USACE have already determined the project will likely have significant adverse impacts to the environment. Each EIS will help inform decision-makers about the next steps for reviewing the proposal.

Q: What is a substantive EIS scoping comment?

Substantive comments provide facts and information for the review agencies to consider. Public comments might address issues such as likely environmental impacts and potential mitigation measures, the degree to which various types of resources could be affected, project alternatives and methodologies, and new data or studies. Comments that are simply in support or opposition to the proposed project are not considered substantive during EIS scoping.

Q: Does it matter how many times a comment is made?

Agencies will consider all substantive scoping comments they receive during the 31-day public comment period, so it doesn't matter how many times the same comment is made. Duplicate comments will not increase the value or weight of a substantive comment.

Q: If I make my comments at an upcoming public meeting, will they have more value?

All substantive comments will receive equal consideration—regardless whether they are made in person, submitted online, and sent to the agencies by mail.

Q: Who decides what each EIS will evaluate?

The agencies will decide what each EIS will include after considering the comments we receive during the EIS scoping period.

Q: Where can I find a response to my scoping comment?

The agencies will consider all substantive comments and prepare a scoping summary document. However, the summary document will not include responses to scoping comments.

Q: I made a comment on the 2017 "programmatic" EIS for the Chehalis Basin Strategy. Will my comment be automatically included in the state and federal EIS for the District's proposed project?

Ecology and USACE will each develop an EIS for the District's proposed Chehalis River flood-damage reduction project that will be separate from the earlier programmatic EIS for the Strategy. The most valuable comments we can receive will be those that are specific to the new project proposal.