

CHEHALIS BASIN STRATEGY: POLICY WORKSHOP NOTES

Date: October 7, 2015
Location: Great Wolf Lodge

Introduction and Purpose of Workshop

The purpose of the workshop was to present major findings of the work completed in 2013-2015, including:

- Use of the Chehalis Basin by aquatic species and potential strategies for habitat restoration
- Potential effects of actions to reduce flood damage, including the latest information on the potential feasibility of a water retention facility.

The workshop also provided opportunities to obtain input on key questions for determining the focus and scope of the Programmatic EIS.

All presentations from the workshop are available at: <http://chehalisbasinstrategy.com/publications/>

Notes

The purpose of these notes is to record key points, decisions, and discussion topics. They are not intended to be transcripts.

Focus and Process for 2015-2017 Biennium

Presented by Jim Kramer (Facilitator and Project Manager)

Summary

The purpose of the Chehalis Basin Strategy is to substantially reduce damage from catastrophic floods and substantially restore degraded aquatic species habitat in the Chehalis Basin. The need for the Chehalis Basin Strategy is to address recent extreme flooding and drought conditions experienced in the Chehalis Basin, as there is a potential for greater magnitude and frequency of these events in the future. Additionally, aquatic species habitat in the Chehalis Basin is significantly degraded, and if action is not taken, this degradation is expected to continue.

There are four main components of the Chehalis Basin Strategy 2015-2017 work effort:

- Preparing a programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess program-level effects related to implementing a flood damage reduction and aquatic species habitat restoration strategy in the Chehalis Basin
- Development of an Aquatic Species Restoration Plan (ASRP) and early on-the-ground restoration actions

- Analyses of a potential water retention facility and other specific actions proposed for flood damage reduction
- Research and ongoing data collection for aquatic species in the Chehalis Basin

More information on the focus and process for the 2015-2017 biennium can be found at <http://chehalisbasinstrategy.com>

Major Findings of Data Collected in 2013-2015

Aquatic Species Use of the Chehalis Basin

Presented by John Ferguson (Anchor QEA)

Summary

During the 2013-2015 biennium, a number of analyses were performed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Department of Ecology, Chehalis Tribe, United States Geological Survey (USGS), and a consultant team to understand several questions related to aquatic species in the Chehalis Basin. Major findings of the analyses included:

- The habitats in the Chehalis River Basin support a wide diversity of aquatic and semi-aquatic species and life histories
- Salmon use habitat across the entire watershed
- Finding cool water in the hot summer months is critical for salmon rearing/holding, and temperatures in the mainstem of the river exceed temperatures healthy for the salmon
- Temperatures in the upper watershed remain cool and support juvenile salmon rearing
- The proposed dam site currently provides habitat that is used by salmonids and other aquatic and semi-aquatic species; juvenile salmon move back and forth through the potential dam site
- Information gathered from recent studies will be essential for informing the restoration strategies that will be developed in the Aquatic Species Restoration Plan (ASRP).

Potential Habitat Restoration Actions Considered

Presented by Dave Price (WDFW)

Summary

WDFW and consultant team staff have identified several key considerations for restoration actions in the Chehalis Basin:

- Restoration strategies should focus on sustaining or improving habitat diversity for native species
- Process-based restoration which relies on natural processes is needed to support habitat and ecosystem functions at watershed scale

- Preserving and expanding limited summer rearing and holding habitat will be important for cool-water species such as salmon and steelhead
- The ability to successfully restore the Chehalis Basin will continue to grow as knowledge of the system evolves.

Near-term restoration actions are likely to focus on removal of fish passage barriers, riparian and off-channel habitat restoration, bank erosion, in-water wood structure addition, and floodplain reconnection; because the bulk of this work will occur on private property, effective landowner outreach and engagement is critical for successful restoration efforts. WDFW is currently coordinating with tribal governments and state and local entities to develop a process for construction of future restoration projects as well as scoping and design work.

Flooding within the Chehalis Basin / Reducing Flood Damage

Presented by Larry Karpack (WSE) and Anne Falcon (EES)

Summary

The frequency of floods in the Chehalis Basin and associated flood-damage is increasing; the five largest flood events on record have all occurred since 1986, and the 100-year flood estimate has increased 33% in the last 30 years. An analysis of the top 10 historical flood events show that the Upper Chehalis River has a significantly higher relative contribution of flood waters than the Cascade Tributaries.

The economic/alternatives analyses conducted in 2013-2015 estimated \$3.5 billion of damages over the next 100 years if no action is taken to reduce flood-damage. Other key findings included:

- The biggest driver of economic benefits comes from reducing damage to structures, content, and inventory
- Including potential impacts from climate change increase benefits for most project alternatives
- Flood-proofing is a viable solution to damage reduction for residential structures and content; however, it does not reduce the damage from flooded roads, the majority of commercial buildings, and other economic impacts
- Alone or combined with other projects, a flood retention facility provides positive net economic benefits
- The I-5 alternative of walls and levees on its own has a greater cost than the economic benefit it provides
- No option will mitigate all flooding damages from the Chehalis Basin

Potential Dam Feasibility

Presented by Bob Montgomery (Anchor QEA)

Summary

There are currently two potential dam alternatives being evaluated, a flood-retention only facility and a flood-retention and flow augmentation facility that would include a permanent reservoir. Major findings from the recent geotechnical site investigations for a potential dam on the upper Chehalis River showed no fatal flaws for the foundation of a dam and a foundation suitable for a roller-compacted concrete or rockfill dam type. In addition, suitable aggregate volume is likely available in the proximity of the dam site and cost estimates from conceptual designs presented in 2014 are valid.

During the 2015-2017 biennium additional analyses will be conducted on dam and fish passage design, hydrologic and hydraulic modeling, climate change impacts, sediment transport/geomorphology, water quality, water temperature, off-channel habitat, and downstream wetland and riparian areas.

Programmatic SEPA EIS

Why Prepare a Programmatic SEPA EIS?

Presented by: Tom Clingman (Department of Ecology)

Summary

The Programmatic EIS, being led by the Department of Ecology, will provide a broad, program-level review of issues related to strategies rather than site-specific design details. More detailed environmental review will be conducted for specific projects. The purpose of the Programmatic EIS is to:

- Provide a formal state process to engage the public, tribes, federal, state and local governments
- Provide a holistic view of the strategy to evaluate impacts on a programmatic scale
- Provide relevant information to determine what will be pursued in the next steps of the environmental review process and support a decision by the Governor for the long-term strategy for the Chehalis Basin

Scoping is the first step in the EIS process, and the public scoping period will run from to Sept. 18 to Oct 19, 2015. The final EIS, which will be used to inform future decisions, will be ready in fall/winter 2016.

Alternatives that will be evaluated in the EIS include:

- “No Action” Alternative - which would continue the existing level of flood damage reduction actions and habitat improvements)
- Governor’s Chehalis Basin Work Group Proposed Strategy – which would include comprehensive aquatic species habitat restoration, water retention, local-scale flood damage reduction projects, and nonstructural actions
- Alternative Strategy – which would be identical to the Work Group strategy, except it would include walls and levees adjacent to I-5, with no flood retention facility.

Dave Bingaman of the Quinault Indian Nation (QIN) also briefly presented a new restorative flood protection alternative that the QIN would like to have evaluated in the Programmatic EIS. Restorative flood protection would use natural features such as vegetation, wood debris, and floodplains to store and slow the flow of water, thereby reducing downstream flood stage. A preliminary scope has been prepared by Natural Systems Design, Inc. (NSD) and others on behalf of the QIN, and was provided to the Department of Ecology for consideration.

Discussion of EIS Scoping Questions

Facilitated by: Jim Kramer (Ruckelshaus Center)

Summary

Scoping comments can help determine the issues to focus on in an EIS based on input from the public and key stakeholders on important questions. Scoping for the EIS in the Chehalis Basin will provide an opportunity to obtain information on key questions, such as:

- What are the potential issues and environmental resources we should be reviewing?
- Are there other actions that could meet the purpose and need for this project?
- Should the actions be combined differently?
- What other options or changes do you think should be considered?

Key comments and takeaways from the discussion included:

- Some participants brought up the issue of water supply in the Basin, and the potential need for augmenting the river flow for human and agricultural use, not solely for aquatic species habitat.
- It was clarified that a benefit-cost analysis (BCA) is not required in a Programmatic EIS, but the current EIS process for the Chehalis Basin will likely refine the BCA from 2013-2015.
- Regarding the decision-making process, the Governor's Work Group will provide recommendations to the Governor, who will then make a decision on the long-term strategy for the Basin and funding to the legislature for the 2017-2019 biennium.
- WSDOT clarified that as long as a flood retention facility is still being evaluated as a feasible alternative for flood-damage reduction, the agency will not pursue a walls and levees project to protect I-5.
- There is an interest expressed by some stakeholders to evaluate the effect of forest practices on peak flows, and discussion is underway with Ecology and DNR about how to look at the issue.

Follow-up Items

Summary

Below is a list of follow-up items requested by participants during the workshop:

- Information on what tributaries are being evaluated in this biennium's Riverscape studies.
- Information on how the economic analysis looked at ex-vessel prices for salmon.

- Information on the percentage of time a flood-retention only facility would store water.
- Sharing of the QIN scope for a restorative flood protection alternative for the Upper Chehalis River Basin. (attached)
- Sharing of the two-page handout on the Purpose/Need/Range of Alternatives for the Programmatic EIS. (attached)

Workshop Attendees

- Al Smith (Wishkah Road Flood Mitigation Project)
- Anne Falcon (EES)
- Bart Gernhart (WSDOT)
- Bob Montgomery (Anchor QEA)
- Brian Cochrane (WSCC)
- Carol Cloen (WDFW)
- Celest Wilder (City of Chehalis)
- Chrissy Bailey (Ecology)
- Chuck Turley (DNR)
- Cindy Wilson (Thurston County)
- Cindy Zehnder (Lewis County PUD)
- Dale Lewis (Congresswoman Herrera-Butler office)
- Dan Thompson (City of Oakville)
- Dave Bingaman (Quinault Indian Nation)
- David Price (WDFW)
- Deanna Zieske (Westside Chehalis)
- Edna Fund (Lewis County)
- Elyse Clifford (Quinault Indian Nation)
- Erik Neatherlin (WDFW)
- Frank Gordon (Grays Harbor County)
- Heather Page (Anchor QEA)
- J. Vander Stoep (Work Group)
- Jay Gordon (WA Dairy Federation/Work Group)
- Jeff Warnke (Chehalis Tribe)
- Jim Kramer (Ruckelshaus Center)
- John Ferguson (Anchor QEA)
- Julie Balmelli-Powe (City of Chehalis)
- Junior Goodell (Quinault Indian Nation)
- Karen Valenzuela (Work Group)
- Kaylee Osowski (Centralia Chronicle)
- Ken Ghalambor (Ross Strategic/Ruckelshaus Center)
- Kristen Hafer (USACE)
- Lonnie Willey (Pe Ell)
- Mark Mobbs (Quinault Indian Nation)
- Merlin McReynold (City of Chehalis)
- Michael Kern (Ruckelshaus Center)
- Molly Stenovec (Ruckelshaus Center)
- Osa Odum (NWIFC)
- Raymond Walton (WEST)
- Rob Duff (Governor's Office/Work Group)
- Ron Averill (City of Centralia)
- Steve Malloch (Western Water Futures/Work Group)
- Tom Clingman (Ecology)
- Tom Schadt (Anchor QEA)
- Vickie Raines (Grays Harbor County/Work Group)
- Vince Panesko (Panesko Tree Farms)