

Past, Present, & Future: The Road to Reducing Flooding Problems

What's the problem?

Flooding has occurred within the Chehalis River Basin repeatedly, affecting Lewis, Thurston, and Grays Harbor counties. Significant flooding has disrupted the lives of thousands of residents, and has caused millions of dollars of damage to homes and businesses over the past 50 years or more. Most will remember that Interstate 5 was closed for multiple days through Centralia and Chehalis during the most recent floods. These closures all but halted interstate commerce and highlighted the magnitude of the flooding problem for the region, the state, and beyond.

What's being done?

Recent, repeated flooding has made it clear that a coordinated effort to address flooding in the Chehalis River Basin is needed. As a result a temporary Flood Authority was formed in 2008 between eleven jurisdictions within the Chehalis River Basin. The Washington State Legislature appropriated \$2.5 million for the Flood Authority to develop a Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan. An additional \$47.5 million has been set aside by the Legislature for flood control projects.

With the public's input the Flood Authority has developed a Draft Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan. The Plan defines the basin's flooding problems and proposes solutions to those problems. The proposed solutions consist of: major regional projects, such as levee construction and flood storage; projects to address specific, local problems; non-structural actions, such as public education and information, emergency response, and forest management practices; and "ripe and ready" projects, such as an early warning system that will improve flood warning within the Basin. While the State is providing some money for these projects it is not a sufficient amount to address all of the problems within the Basin. The Flood Authority has considered a number of options for forming a permanent regional entity, which will make it possible to coordinate flood reduction efforts, provide necessary legal means to select projects for funding, and to oversee project construction.

Who serves on the Flood Authority?

The Flood Authority consists of elected officials and representatives from:

Grays Harbor, Lewis, and Thurston Counties; the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis; the Cities of Aberdeen, Centralia, Chehalis, Montesano, and Oakville; and the Towns of Bucoda and Pe Ell.

What's next?

The Flood Authority's preference is to form an Interlocal Flood Agency, which provides the flexibility to govern, allocate costs, and fund flood control efforts in the Basin on a regional basis. The Flood Authority will make a formal recommendation to the Commissioners of each County, who must approve agency formation. Prior to that decision, the Flood Authority will be holding public meetings to provide more information about and get feedback on Interlocal Flood Agency formation.

What does it mean?

Simply put, the region must address its flooding problems to protect people and property and to support economic and social health. The governments of the region are committed to working together to implement solutions that reduce flooding. These solutions have costs that must be shared by the people who live and work within the Chehalis River Basin. The Flood Authority, like the rest of the people who live within the Chehalis River Basin, is eager to get going on flood reduction projects. However, its members realize the need to balance flood reduction with the current economic situation. Regardless of the approach used to reduce flooding, the Flood Authority will start with smaller projects and will be conservative with the taxes or charges it collects to fund flood reduction projects. The Flood Authority realizes that it is too costly and difficult to prevent all flooding damage and believes a more reasonable approach is to reduce flooding problems.

How can you get involved?

The Flood Authority will continue to keep the public informed and involved. Public meetings will be held in the Basin this October and in early 2011. The October public meetings will provide opportunities to learn more about the Interlocal Flood Agency formation process and to accept input on the key issues related to agency formation. The early 2011 meetings will focus on how the agency will operate, the taxes and/or charges that may be collected, its boundaries, and flood reduction project priorities.

Public meetings will be held from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. on:

- Thursday, October 14 at Swede Hall in Rochester*
- Monday, October 18 at City Hall in Montesano*
- Thursday, October 28 at the Centralia Middle School in Centralia*

*Presentation at 6 p.m. each night

Need more information?

The public is invited to learn more about agency formation by attending Flood Authority meetings. Information about these meetings and other information and documents are available at:

<http://lewiscountywa.gov/communitydevelopment/chehalis-river-basin-flood-authority>

You can also email us at info@chehalisriverbasin.org

Did you know?

According to a 2009 survey conducted in Grays Harbor, Lewis, and Thurston Counties that:

- 9 out of 10 respondents reported some flood impacts (road closures, work or school schedules impacted, extended power outages).
- 97% agreed that flooding affects more than just the people whose property is flooded.
- 91% agreed that preventing flood damage is critical to the well being of the Basin.

Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority Timeline

Process

Key Decisions

