



QUINAULT INDIAN NATION PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - September 28, 2018

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NEW DAM: QUINAULT NATION RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT COST, BENEFITS AND SALMON

Taholah, WA – The Quinault Indian Nation is raising major questions and concerns about a proposed dam on the Upper Chehalis River. Environmental review starts today with a scoping period that gives the public a chance for input on state and federal government studies of the potential impacts of building a new dam in the second largest river basin in Washington State.

“The Quinault Nation appreciates the opportunity to raise questions and concerns about whether a dam is the right choice for the people, communities, fish and wildlife of the Chehalis River Basin,” said Tyson Johnston, Vice-President of the Quinault Indian Nation.

The proposed dam is part of the Chehalis Basin Strategy which seeks to address two major goals in the Chehalis River Basin: flood damage reduction and habitat restoration for salmon and other aquatic species. The Quinault Indian Nation sits on the seven-member Chehalis Basin Board, which provides oversight for the Strategy.

“The Quinault Nation is committed to collaboration with the state and federal governments and our basin neighbors to address the dual goals of flood damage reduction and habitat restoration,” said Johnston. “Now is the time to talk about how much the dam will cost, who will benefit and who won’t, and how it will affect salmon runs that have been on the decline for decades. Government studies should also provide meaningful alternatives to a dam.”

The cost of the dam could easily top a \$1 billion dollars. According to a recent budget estimate from the Office of Chehalis Basin, the dam would cost \$628 million for permitting, design, engineering, mitigation and construction. A 2014 [study](#) of 245 dams in 65 countries, however, shows an average cost overrun of 96% for dam building. State funding for the Chehalis Basin Strategy isn’t unlimited. If the dam were built, its high cost may make other flood damage reduction and habitat restoration actions difficult to fund.

Many communities in the basin may not benefit from the dam. The project sponsor (Chehalis River Basin Flood Control Zone District) states that the primary purpose of the dam is to “reduce flood peak levels during a 100-year flood or greater from Pe Ell to Centralia.” The dam would do little to address flood risks for people and property in major portions of the Basin, including the Wynoochee, Satsop, Newaukum and Humptulips river valleys. It’s unclear how much the dam would help communities on the mainstem of the Chehalis River in the lower basin, which includes the communities of Aberdeen, Hoquiam, Elma and Montesano.

Impacts to salmon could be irreversible. The Chehalis Basin Strategy acknowledges unavoidable impacts to salmon while relying on an ambitious habitat restoration plan to improve conditions for fish and wildlife in the basin. The only action being proposed for environmental review and permitting, however, is building a dam.

“The Aquatic Species Restoration Plan (ASRP) is a much-needed and welcome proposal for restoration actions, but they would need to continue for decades after a dam is built,” said Johnston. “There is no guarantee restoration funding will continue long enough to offset the unavoidable impacts of a dam.”

The Quinault Nation will be asking for the environmental review of the dam to clearly, and openly, consider the impact to salmon and aquatic species as a stand-alone alternative. The environmental review process should also consider alternatives to a dam to meet the dual goals of the Chehalis Basin Strategy.

Study of alternatives should include flood damage reduction measures beyond floodproofing. A combination of conservation and flood easements, voluntary land sales or trades, and land use measures may offer the most cost-effective way to meet the flood damage and habitat restoration goals of the Strategy across the entire basin.

Floodproofing is important, but it’s limited to infrastructure like raising houses and building farm pads that provide higher-ground refuge from flooding. Some property owners need a more comprehensive approach to address severe flood risk from inevitable erosion and river channel migration.

The review process provides for public input simultaneously on two separate Environmental Impacts Statements (EIS) being prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Washington State Dept. of Ecology. The public comment scoping period runs from September 28 to October 29, 2018. Public hearings are planned in Montesano on Oct. 16 and Centralia on Oct. 17.

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