



Upper Quinault River Roads & Access Plan

Frequently Asked Questions

April 2019

Q) How did this project get started?

The Quinault Nation began work on habitat restoration in the Upper Quinault River in the mid-2000s out of deep concern for the declining health and abundance of Blueback salmon and the impact of infrastructure and development on habitat in the Upper Quinault River. As the Quinault Nation worked with private landowners and road management agencies to address challenges facing salmon it became apparent that managing the current road network as is was not a sustainable solution. Options were needed to provide sustainable access and address the growing risks of erosion, channel migration, flooding and related damage while actively restoring habitat conditions over time. The Quinault Nation received funding from Washington State's Floodplains by Design program in 2015 to work with the community and road managers to develop options that would provide sustainable access, address and support community interests while improving habitat conditions.

Q) What are the goals of the project?

The goals of the project are to:

- Provide sustainable access in the Upper Quinault River valley
- Address and support the shared interests and values of local residents, landowners and businesses, resource users, and the Quinault Indian Nation
- Improve salmon habitat conditions in the Upper Quinault River valley

The project is funded by Washington State's Floodplains by Design program and alternatives developed as part of the project must be consistent with the program's goals. According to the state's ¹webpage: "Floodplains by Design is our primary grant program for projects in the floodplain. This partnership of local and tribal governments, state and federal agencies, and private organizations works to coordinate projects that reduce community flood hazards while restoring the natural functions Washington rivers and floodplains provide." Local organizations have used Floodplains by Design grants to improve flood protection for towns and farms, restore salmon habitat, improve water quality, and enhance outdoor recreation.

¹ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Shoreline-coastal-management/Hazards/Floods-floodplain-planning/Floodplains-by-design>

Q) Are major changes to the road system really needed? Can't the current road managers – National Park Service, Grays Harbor County and Jefferson County – just continue to repair and maintain the road system the way it is?

Taking no action is, and will continue to be, an option. But maintaining the status quo is not sustainable over the long-term. Washouts and emergency repairs resulting from erosion, channel migration and flood damage have become chronic and costly problems. These problems are expected to continue in the future. Without proactive action to find solutions local residents, businesses and property owners who depend on the road system will only become more vulnerable to ongoing and inevitable erosion, channel migration and flooding. The possibility of a major flood washing away miles of roads that could take years to repair is all too real. Doing nothing may be the most costly and disruptive option in the long-term.

Q) Isn't this a land grab by the Quinault Indian Nation and National Park Service to remove private property and landowners from the valley?

No. The goal of the project is to maintain the current extent of access and provide a sustainable road system while improving habitat conditions for salmon. Decisions about major changes to roads and infrastructure will have to carefully balance access, cost, landowner and community concerns, safety and compatibility with habitat restoration efforts. Major options, like moving roads, will only happen with the voluntary cooperation of private property-owners and land management agencies.

Q) Are the Quinault Indian Nation and National Park Service intending to close-off access to the Upper Valley by removing roads and the Park Service bridge?

No. Various options are being considered to address flood risks including lengthening the bridge and realigning or relocating roads while keeping the loop road open. These options have been part of the research and planning phase of the project to better understand their potential impacts and benefits to people and salmon. For example, based on community input to date and ongoing study of options, removal of the National Park Service bridge is no longer being considered as an option. The project is currently in the planning phase and considering a wide range of options to balance community concerns about loop access and habitat conditions. Final decisions and implementation will only proceed with the support of the community as well as land and road managers.

Q) Are the roads and other infrastructure in the valley really causing a decline in salmon runs? Aren't other factors like overfishing and poor ocean conditions bigger problems for salmon?

Unusually warm water in the Pacific Ocean has significantly reduced salmon abundance in recent years and the Quinault Indian Nation has responded by cancelling the 2019 fishing season for Quinault River Blueback salmon. But there are many other factors that have led to the decline of salmon. Improving habitat conditions where salmon spawn and rear is essential to improving their survival and abundance regardless of ocean conditions.

²Historically, Quinault River sockeye had more than 55 miles of high-quality spawning habitat between Lake Quinault and the Olympic National Park boundary. Today there is about 3 miles of suitable spawning habitat within this same area. Past forest removal, land-use practices, roads infrastructure and other factors have destabilized the river channel and eliminated many of the side channels where salmon historically spawned. Historically, the upper Quinault River was made up of one or more stable channels. Today the river is more unstable with the active channel moving across the river valley much more rapidly and extensively which has reduced the availability and quality of spawning and rearing habitat. This rapid channel movement has also resulted in the river affecting infrastructure within the channel migration zone and will continue to be a significant threat to roads, private property and access without action that changes conditions over the long-term.

Q) How and when will a decision be made about the options we've heard about?

There is no definite timeline for when a decision will or must be made. It is more important to the Quinault Nation to work through the process in a way that is transparent and supported by the community as well as land and road managers. The Quinault Nation and roads managers are in the early stages of this process, having identified some preliminary alternatives that were intended to be a starting point for the conversation with all the various interests.

² <https://nwifc.org/restoration-of-critical-sockeye-habitat-on-upper-quinault-river-begins/>