

CHAPTER TWO

Pierce County Flood History

2.1 FLOOD EVENTS IN PIERCE COUNTY HISTORY

For better or worse, the history of flooding in Pierce County is an important part of its identity. Historical records of flooding along the rivers in Pierce County date back to the nineteenth century when pioneers first settled in the area. To paraphrase, “Floods Happen.”

This section describes the major historical flood events in Pierce County. Historical records of flooding are not broken down by basin. Therefore, this section will review past flood events for Pierce County as a whole. For future enhancements to this risk assessment, the County will attempt to track damage by basin so that historic data can be applied specifically to each basin.

Table 2-1 lists past “federally declared disasters” in Pierce County due to flooding. These declarations represent the most severe flooding events since 1962 that have been compensated with federal money.

Disaster #	Date	Damage Estimates (\$)
DR-1671	12/12/2006	10,351,524 ^b
DR-1499	11/7/2003	4,400,000 ^c
DR-1159	1/7/1997	10,293,746
DR-1100	2/9/1996	31,182,750
DR-1079	1/3/1996	930,917
DR-896	3/8/1991	Information not available
DR-883	11/26/1990	1,403,390 ^a
DR-852	1/18/1990	934,049 ^a
DR-784	12/15/1986	17,000,000 (state-wide)
DR-545	12/10/1977	Information not available
DR-492	12/13/1975	Information not available
DR-328	3/24/1972	Information not available
DR-185	12/29/1964	Information not available
DR-137	10/20/1962	Information not available

^a Public Assistance (PA) only
^b Estimated Personal Property Damages from PDA
^c Individual Assistance state-wide

There have been 14 Presidential declared flood events within Pierce County since 1962. Since 1990, flood events within Pierce County have accounted for approximately \$59.5 million in flood related damages. Based on this trend, Pierce County has experienced at least one major flood event every 38 months over the past 25 years. The flood season typically runs between October and March, with November and December being the most likely time frame for flood events to occur, based on past experience (50% of the 14 declared events occurred during either November or December). The more significant flood events that have impacted Pierce County are described as follows:

2.1.1 DR-896, DR-1079, DR-1100 AND DR 1159

The flooding of 1996-1997 will remain in memory as one of the worst in the region. All of Pierce County's major rivers reached flood stage or above. It was the largest flood on record for the Puyallup River. There were 10,000 feet of levee partially damaged and 20,000 feet completely destroyed. The Nisqually River also had an unprecedented recorded event. The amount of water released from the Alder/LaGrande dams located on the Nisqually River exceeded the capacity of the river channel. Throughout the county, surface water flooding occurred and sandbagging continued for weeks.

2.1.2 DR-1671

This event came as the result of a strong, warm and very wet Pacific weather system that brought record amounts of rainfall to Washington throughout the month of November 2006, leading to major flooding around the state. This storm, fueled in part from sub-tropical moisture associated with former western Pacific typhoon Cimeron, produced rainfall amounts between 10 to 38 inches in the Cascade and Olympic Mountains and 4 to 10 inches in western Washington lowlands during this period. The mountains had little if any snow packs at the time, so the floods were driven by rainfall.

Public facility damage estimates for the planning area totaled approximately \$20,684,200. Based on this disaster declaration, public assistance (PA), Individual assistance (IA) was made available to the planning area by FEMA, and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding was made available to eligible applicants statewide.