

Frequently asked questions about the proposed Flood Control Zone District

September 2011



Pierce County

Why does Pierce County want to form a Flood Control Zone District (FCZD)?

Vital transportation infrastructure is at risk from flood damage. Interstate 5 and Highways 167 and 410 are at risk of closure from flooding. The economic impact of recent similar closures in Lewis County exceeded \$10 million per day.

Three major wastewater treatment plants serving over 200,000 people are at risk of damage from flooding. Loss of a treatment plant, even temporarily, can expose Commencement Bay and Puget Sound to millions of gallons of untreated sewage. The environmental devastation caused by a damaged treatment plant would be immense.

Our river levees do not meet federal standards for flood protection. More than \$300 million in priority repairs and upgrades are needed on flood levee and bank stabilization projects countywide. Pierce County wants to ensure sufficient funding to address

the maintenance, repair, and reconstruction of our region's critical flood protection facilities.

If established, a Pierce County Flood Control Zone District (FCZD) would be a special-purpose government to fund flood-protection projects and programs in Pierce County. Many of the flood protection facilities in Pierce County were built in the early 1920s or before. They were not built to current standards and many are now reaching the end of useful life. Pierce County's flood-protection infrastructure must be strengthened to protect lives, homes, and businesses. Floods pose significant risk to public safety and health, regionally-important economic centers, and transportation corridors.

Who is in charge of a FCZD?

State law identifies the county council as the governing Board of Supervisors of the district. The Board of Supervisors provides policy direction for the District activities and selects flood projects to be funded. Through interlocal agreements, the Public Works and Utilities department could design and build the approved projects. State law identifies the County Engineer as the administrator of the district.

Existing county staff would do as much of the work as possible so that district revenue can be used for projects and programs, minimizing administration costs.

Why now? Why not wait?

We cannot afford to wait. Storms hitting the nation and the region in the last five years have been catastrophic. The 2006 and 2009 floods in Pierce County caused tens of millions of dollars in property damage. With forecasts of more extreme weather, we could suffer a serious flood every two or three years and that flooding could grow worse. Flooding in Pierce County affects every resident. Floods disrupt jobs, shopping, health care, schools, recreational activities and emergency response throughout the region. Damage to major wastewater treatment plants along rivers can pose serious health risks to people and Puget Sound.

A major flood's impact lingers when roads, bridges or utility lines are damaged—affecting everything from grocery distribution to aircraft assembly plant operations. Employees and customers of major economic centers—such as the Port of Tacoma and Joint Base Lewis McChord—rely on the transportation network. Floods threaten lives, property, major transportation corridors, communities and regional economic centers

Pierce County must be ready to use funds that become available on short notice. In the Chehalis area, \$20 million of state funding was not used because there was no consensus on flood control priorities and no countywide organization authorized to use the funds.

How often has Pierce County experienced flooding disasters?

Since 1990, Pierce County has experienced a federally-declared flood disaster nine times. According to University of Washington scientists, climate change is projected to increase the frequency of flooding in most western Washington river basins. Future floods are expected to exceed the protective abilities of our existing flood facilities.

Pierce County has 11 significant floodplains along the Puyallup, White, Carbon, Nisqually, Greenwater, and Mashel rivers, and South Prairie Creek. The

floodplains range from the very urban nine miles along the lower Puyallup River to the rural Nisqually River between Elbe and Ashford. Many of the levees along these rivers were built more than 80 years ago by farmers to protect their fields. Now, these aging levees protect major business centers, residences, and critical public facilities such as roads, bridges, and sewer treatment plants.

How does flooding affect me?

It has been estimated that a major flood in Pierce County could generate flood-related losses in excess of \$725 million. As the regional service provider, Pierce County government has taken the lead in identifying options and alternatives to address regional flooding risks. Pierce County contracted with ENTRIX, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in environmental risk management, to analyze the economic and social impacts of a major flood event to the region. What they found:

PIERCE COUNTY ECONOMY

- 11,868 jobs at businesses located within the 100-year floodplain
- Estimated range of lost economic output: \$12.6–\$46.2 million
- Estimated range of personal property losses: \$199.1–\$520.8 million

TRANSPORTATION

Delays caused by road and rail closures are estimated to cost \$12.6–\$19.3 million. People and businesses countywide rely on these transportation routes. In the event of a 100-year flood, road and rail closures would include:

- Interstate 5
- State Route 509
- State Route 410
- Pacific Highway/State Route 99
- Amtrak, BNSF, and UP railways

Flooding compromises the ability of the Port of Tacoma to compete for discretionary cargo if the Port's clientele is concerned about delays in the transportation chain due to flooding.

- The Port of Tacoma's trade volume averages \$98.6 million/day
- Recreation, Mt. Rainier, and Crystal Mountain

- Mt. Rainier National Park would experience closure due to channel migration for 2 to 6 months
- Economic impact of closing Mt. Rainier: \$0.5–\$9.6 million total output
- Jobs impacted by closing Mt. Rainier: 70–550 jobs
- Crystal Mountain would experience daily closures costing \$0.1 million average daily output

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 21,193 individuals living in the floodplain
- 9,340 homes located in the floodplain
- Three wastewater treatment plants located in the floodplain that could spill into Puget Sound if flooded. Regional impacts of spilled sewage affect Puget Sound
 - ♦ Spill raw or partially treated sewage
 - ♦ Require two weeks to six months to return plants to full secondary treatment and disinfection
 - ♦ Disrupt businesses and homes served in the cities of Puyallup (37,000 people served), Tacoma (154,000 people served), Sumner and Bonney Lake (25,000 people served)
 - ♦ Result in repair costs of \$3–\$120 million

What projects and programs will the FCZD fund?

When formed, the Flood Control Zone District must adopt by resolution those flood control or storm water control improvements that it will fund. The identified projects must be part of a comprehensive plan for flood control for that stream or watercourse. The plan must be submitted to the State Department of Ecology before beginning the flood control project. The Flood Control Zone District has the option of adopting the Pierce County Flood Hazard Management Plan as the required plan.

What are typical FCZD projects?

The projects range in scope from maintaining existing levees to constructing new flood reduction structures. Projects can also include non-structural solutions such as buying flood-prone properties or drafting model land use regulations that keep people and structures out of flood danger areas.

Projects could include:

- Flood hazard reduction projects with the greatest regional significance

- Regional flood warning and emergency response
- Flood facility maintenance
- Public education and outreach
- Mapping and technical studies
- Mechanisms for citizen inquiry and public response

How would the FCZD develop and implement programs and projects?

While the Board of Supervisors would function as the primary governing body for the district, several committees and project partners may also offer input. While the District would be an independent agency, the County Council and Executive are committed to establishing an efficient, project-oriented organization. Existing organizations and resources will be used wherever possible. The FCZD will not duplicate existing government services. In addition,

- An advisory committee will be set up to help decide which projects get funded first. An important future decision will be deciding the best way to involve local jurisdictions, tribes, and stakeholders as advisors to the district's program and future capital projects.
- The Flood Control Zone District may also partner with a wide range of external entities—from state and federal agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to local governments, watershed groups and tribal governments.

The Public Works and Utilities department could carry out approved flood protection projects and programs under contract with the Flood Control Zone District.

How would FCZD projects and programs be funded?

Right now, no funding decisions have been made, because the District has not been formed. State law authorizes a District to collect a property tax or a parcel fee.

The funds would be used for projects that reduce flood risks to people and property in Pierce County. This includes building structures that minimize floods risks and helping business and employees stay operational when a flood occurs.

State law allows flood control zone districts to not only levy a tax or a fee to build flood control projects, but also to maintain and operate flood control infrastructure. The County Council and Executive are considering an approach that unites Pierce County with one rate for all property owners.

Initial thoughts are to set a rate no higher than 10 cents per \$1,000 assessed value even though State law allows a higher threshold. This amounts to \$21.50 per year on a \$215,000 home. This local funding will leverage state and federal matching funds when grant programs require local match.

Because major floods affect the entire region, the proposed flood control zone district includes the entire county—both unincorporated areas and the cities within the county. Some cities have requested that the county recognize that areas of the County benefit more from the formation of a FCZD and that this should be considered during the legislative process.

The same State law that allows the formation of a FCZD requires that any funds collected by the district only be spent on specific flood-related actions. It cannot be used for other government purposes.

The Board of Supervisors would vote annually on a revenue proposal for flood risk reduction projects and programs. They have the authority to eliminate or adjust the amount of the taxes or fees as circumstances change.

If there is a tax, why isn't it charged only to people who live in floodplains?

Although people who have homes or businesses in the floodplain are at a more immediate risk, flooding affects the entire regional economy. Approximately 21,000 people live in the floodplain areas of our river and another 12,000 work within it. On average, 205,000 vehicles a day travel transportation corridors that are at risk of flooding. Wastewater treatment for over 200,000 residents occurs in the affected floodplains.

If Interstate 5 is at risk, why doesn't the state fund levee repairs?

The Washington State Department of Transportation is participating in funding the study effort. In

addition, the state legislature has authorized local governments to collect funds and handle flood hazards locally through the creation of flood control zone districts. The state has funded flood control projects in King County and Lewis County when state significant infrastructure is at risk.

What Happens If We Don't Create a FCZD?

The Flood Control Zone District would focus on reducing flood hazards to people and property. Even if your home or business is not in the flood zone, major economic centers are (e.g. I-5, River Road, Pacific Highway, the Port area). If these areas are affected by flooding, the local and regional economy would be severely strained.

Flood events have caused significant damage to Pierce County. Recent flood events caused closures of I-5 in Chehalis and near-closures of I-5 in Fife. Those risks greatly affect business, transportation, and quality of life in our communities. A new district would focus on addressing flood risks to prevent damages to our economy and property.

When will these decisions be made?

Pierce County is reaching out to local jurisdictions and stakeholders throughout 2011 to discuss the District and respond to questions and concerns. Pierce County is also conducting a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review of this decision.

Tentative plans are to introduce a District formation ordinance in early 2012, including a public hearing process. The Boundary Review Board will then have the opportunity to review the proposal. Once all reviews have been completed, the county council can act to form the District and the District could begin planning.

More information:

Visit the website at www.piercecountywa.org/fczd, or contact Brian Ziegler, Director of Public Works and Utilities at 253-798-7250.



Pierce County