

Pierce County Rivers Flood Hazard Management Plan Overview

What is the Pierce County Rivers Flood Hazard Management Plan?

Pierce County Public Works and Utilities Department, Surface Water Management Division is developing a long-term plan to guide river management to reduce damages from floods, while enhancing important fisheries resources in the Puyallup, White, Carbon and Nisqually rivers. The Pierce County Rivers Flood Hazard Management Plan (“Plan”) will identify and recommend regional policies, programs, and projects related to flooding and channel migration on major rivers to: (1) reduce risks to public health and safety, (2) reduce public and private property damage; (3) reduce facility maintenance costs, and (4) maintain or improve habitat conditions.

Pierce County watershed basin plans focus on streams and tributaries, with little or no emphasis on major rivers. The Rivers Flood Hazard Management Plan will use: (1) the best available technical information, (2) an inclusive stakeholder process, and (3) an analysis of “levels-of-service” (protection) and funding alternatives for implementation. The Plan will address complex economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions; federal, state, and local regulations; and existing legal agreements that affect flood hazard management.

Goals of the Flood Hazard Management Plan

- Reduce risks to life and property from river flooding and channel migration
- Identify and implement flood hazard management activities in a cost-effective manner
- Support compatible human uses, economic sustainability, and improve habitat conditions in flood-prone and channel migration areas
- Develop a sustainable and flexible funding strategy for river flood hazard management

What areas will be addressed by the Plan?

The study area encompasses:

- The **Puyallup River** from the mouth at Commencement Bay to approximately the Champion Bridge (near river mile 29)
- The **White River** from the mouth at the Puyallup River to the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation (river mile 9) and in the vicinity of the Greenwater area;
- The **Carbon River** from its mouth at the Puyallup River to the upper end of Alward Road (river mile 8);
- The **Nisqually River** in the McKenna area and near Ashford and Mt. Rainier National Park;
- Lower reaches of other large rivers with historical peak streamflows over 5,000 cubic feet per second (cfs): **Greenwater River, Mashel River, South Prairie Creek**
- Extensive areas adjacent to these rivers in unincorporated Pierce County, as well as portions of the cities of Tacoma, Fife, Puyallup, Sumner, Orting and Pacific.

When and how will the Flood Hazard Management Plan be developed and adopted?

The County has assembled a multi-disciplinary team consisting of various departments and programs to



develop the plan, with input from an Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee will have broad stakeholder representation, including cities, tribes, resource agencies, business and environmental interests, floodplain residents and citizens. There will be an extensive public involvement process that includes open houses, workshops, surveys and other opportunities for input as the plan develops. The draft plan will be available for formal public review and comment in late 2010 and a final plan is expected to be transmitted to the Pierce County Council for adoption in 2011.

Why is it important to develop the plan now?

The only river flood management plan in Pierce County is nearly 20 years old and addressed only the Puyallup, Carbon and White rivers; no such plan was ever developed for the Nisqually River. Human population, property values, advances in science and engineering, and our understanding of the importance of natural riverine processes have all grown significantly in the past two decades.

Since the early 1990s, significant floods in November 1995 and February 1996, and several recent floods (November 2006, November 2008, and January 2009) have caused extensive flood damage. The 1991 Growth Management Act requires growth planning and protection of natural resources. The proposed update to the National Flood Insurance Program rate maps extensively expands flood prone areas in the Puyallup River system, which will impact property owners and businesses. Demand is growing for construction and maintenance of flood protection and river management structures in unincorporated and incorporated areas of Pierce County.

Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act requirements call for updated and creative approaches to river and floodplain management. Pierce County elected officials and citizens have varied opinions on the level-of-service that is desirable or achievable, and how much residents and businesses are willing to invest to achieve this protection. Global climate change is likely to result in both rising sea level and changes in flood frequency and magnitude that have the potential to significantly increase flood risks in the near- and long-term future. New momentum has been created by the Lower Puyallup River Executive Task Force, the Channel Migration Zone Citizen Advisory Committee, the completion of the Puyallup River Watershed Levee Setback Feasibility Study, and county and city elected official's interest in addressing flooding and channel migration concerns.

The Plan will address the range of resource and policy issues facing local jurisdictions, resource managers, tribes, property owners and businesses.

How can I get involved in the Flood Hazard Management planning effort?

A stakeholder Advisory Committee will convene in summer 2009 and meet regularly over the duration of the project. Advisory Committee meetings will be held during the day and will provide an opportunity for public comment. In addition, at least three public open houses/workshops will be held in the evenings to focus on: (1) project goals and objectives, scope, and other issues; (2) evaluation of alternatives, levels-of-service, and funding; and (3) draft recommendations. Direct mailings, a website, online surveys, email communication, newspaper articles and government access television will help keep people informed and involved as the plan is developed. There will also be opportunities for public input during the Council review and adoption process in early 2011.

Contact Information

To learn more or to participate in this process, please contact Pierce County Surface Water Management: Lorin Reinelt, (253)798-3096 or reinelt@co.pierce.wa.us; or Melissa Paulson, (253) 798-4686 or mpaulso@co.pierce.wa.us. Visit our website at www.piercecountywa.org/floodplan.

