

Corps provides facts on the Centralia Flood Risk Management Project

Contact: Nola Leyde (206) 764-6896

By Col. Michael McCormick

There is a long history of study activities related to flooding on the Chehalis River and its tributaries. The people of Lewis County and Washington State have asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for assistance in reducing the risk of flooding to the cities of Centralia and Chehalis, and the Corps has responded.

The Twin Cities of Centralia and Chehalis, Lewis County and the Corps have worked together to complete the feasibility study. The Centralia Flood Risk Management Project -- reviewed and coordinated with tribes, state and federal agencies, and local interests - was recently authorized by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 and is ready to move forward. We have a completed, approved project that is designed to reduce the risk of flood damage to the Twin Cities and to Interstate 5.

After the devastating flood of December 2007, there has been a lot of discussion about the next steps forward to provide protection from flooding to people and property. I applaud this effort and want the people of the Twin Cities and the State of Washington to have the facts to understand what is accurate, and what is not, about the Corps project and efforts in the Chehalis River Basin.

Project area: Eighty percent of the benefits from the approved project are to reduce the risk of flooding to the cities of Centralia and Chehalis. The project reduces the risk of flooding to the majority of residential, industrial, commercial and public structures in the 100-year flood plain. Twenty percent of the benefits from the project are for the protection of Interstate 5. The project includes the construction of 11 miles of levees on the Chehalis River, levees along the lower two miles of Dillenbaugh Creek, Salzer Creek and Skookumchuck River; raising eight residential structures; and modifications to Skookumchuck Dam to allow 11,000 acre-feet of flood storage.

The Corps' data: The Corps is confident the data used to support the project is accurate, has been carefully reviewed by independent experts, and faulty data was eliminated in the review process.

Review of current flood data: The Corps will update the hydrologic data in the study, including the December 2007 event, and will consider all of the hydraulic and hydrological information available while completing the design of the project.

Other options: The Corps has rigorously explored and objectively evaluated all reasonable alternatives to manage the risk of flooding in the Twin Cities. To move ahead with the Corps' plan does not preclude other entities or even the Corps from pursuing additional flood risk reduction measures or more comprehensive solutions through other efforts. The Corps does have an ongoing study looking at

ecosystem restoration and flood risk management for the entire Chehalis Basin.

Flooding in other areas: The levees are designed to protect the developed areas of the Twin Cities and Interstate 5, while taking advantage of opportunities to allow flooding in undeveloped areas along the Chehalis River. In the flood plain, there are eight residential structures identified that would have to be elevated because the project would increase flood elevations by an average of four inches in a 100-year event.

Corps flood response: The Corps stands ready to support the local communities with future flood fighting efforts, regardless of the local pursuit of the authorized Corps plan. In the December 2007 flood event, the Corps responded to flooding throughout Western Washington and spent more than \$1.5 million for the flood fight, providing technical assistance and repairing levees. The Corps is currently working with local sponsors to make repairs to the Airport, Skookumchuck, Salzer Creek and Long levees damaged in the event.

The federal government requires a willing, nonfederal sponsor to complete the project. Once the design agreement is signed, and with local and federal funding, finalizing the design would take approximately two years. After the design phase is completed, if the project is fully funded, the construction would be completed in approximately four years.

I urge the citizens, elected officials, and interested groups to seek accurate information on the study and the Corps role in the region. More information is available on the Corps' Web site at www.nws.usace.army.mil or by contacting the project manager Laura Orr at (206) 764-3575.

(Col. Michael McCormick is the Seattle District Commander and Engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The mission of the district is to provide service to the Armed Forces and the Nation by designing, constructing, operating, and permitting military / civil works infrastructure and projects that build the Nation's military and long term economic might in an environmentally sustainable way.)