I am a resident of Battle Ground, Wa. I have visited the riparian areas along the Chehalis River and I am deeply concerned about the proposed flood control project on the Chehalis.

The proposed flood control project on the Chehalis River is a project doomed to run Chinook Salmon, steelhead, and SRKW to extinction. Currently, the Chehalis is closed to steelhead fishing due to already low steelhead runs; a prospect of a dam certainly dooms salmon towards extinction as a dam would cause degradation of fish and wildlife habitat, increasing the water temperature and turbidity. The project would, likewise, increase greenhouse gas emissions and impact wetland habitat.

The decline in salmon population is also due to climate change, according to the Dept of Fish and Wildlife. In early January, state experts noted that 25% of the Chehalis River Basin retained optimal temperatures for coho salmon. That is expected to decrease to 6% by 2040 and to 2% by 2080. Scientists maintain that Chinook are the most vulnerable to the increasing temperatures because they spend the most time waiting in upstream areas to spawn.

Furthermore, the destruction of native fish populations of the Chehalis River is a violation of treaty obligations as signed the Treaty of Olympia (1856). The Chehalis Tribe is in opposition to this dam because it would destroy significant cultural sites and their traditional fishing and hunting grounds.

The analysis in the DEIS also revealed that no serious alternative to the dam had been considered. Options for flood control project Plan B would be to provide mitigation and assistance to landowners in the floodplain, invest in habitat restoration, culvert removal, and de-channelization where the river has been artificially narrowed. Furthermore, we need to discourage new floodplain development and timber harvests. Since 2002 about 230,972 acres of the watershed have been logged, according to the state Dept of Natural Resources and this accounts for up to 14 percent of the forestland there. The impacts of clear-cuts and logging roads set the stage for large landslides. These landslides fill creeks and ravines. In some areas, log jams may act like small dams, temporarily holding back water until they topple over or are breached. As the floodwater continues to move, it inundates Chehalis and Centralia, of which as much as 70% lie in the floodplain. Drainage is a problem because of a layer of impervious clay just below the shallow soil.

We cannot continue to subsidize large scale developments and bailouts. Stricter building regulations in the floodplain need to be adopted rather than constructing dams.

Further options for salmon recovery include shoreline restoration and culvert or barrier removal. This would not be cheap or quick and include planting shade trees, shifting sediment and gravel, carving out new eddies and pools, as well as widening and deepening culverts.

Instead of building a dam, let’s improve the health of the river, limit development and logging, improve fish runs and outdoor recreational opportunities in our community and save the wild salmon. Our children and grandchildren will thank us!

Laurie Kerr