



# Flood Preparedness and Response

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## PRESENTERS:

ELIZABETH KOSA, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

SHERIFF DONNELL TANKSLEY

MATT KLEIN, DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DEPUTY DIRECTOR

RANDY RYDEL, FINANCE DIRECTOR

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

JANUARY 13, 2026

# Expectation Settings

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- Not a formal after action report – the response is ongoing
- Not an exhaustive list of all actions taken
- The goal is to provide key background and a shared understanding of the County's work post-2021 flood and provide initial information about the 2025 flood response.



# Outline

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- 1 Whatcom County Public Works
- 2 WSCO/DEM
- 3 Finance Division
- 4 Next Steps



# 2021 November Flood

In 2021, Whatcom County experience major flooding across the entire Nooksack watershed.

Acme, Everson, Nooksack, Sumas, Birch Bay and the Lummi Nation were all impacted significantly and damage estimates reached \$150 million. Damage north of the border measured in the billions.

Since then, the County has worked to prepare for future flooding in collaboration with our municipal, state, tribal, and federal partners.



# Whatcom County Public Works

## Key construction actions since 2021 include:

Repaired 17 key levees, revetments, and maintained sediment traps to protect homes, businesses, farms, roads, and other critical infrastructure.

This includes:

- Truck Road
- Marine Drive Levee
- Everson Overflow Bank Stabilization
- Glacier Creek Levee
- Acme Woody Revetment, Twin View Levee
- Timon Levee
- Upper Hampton Levee
- Lynden Levee Culvert/Channel
- Rainbow Slough Levee



- Saar Creek Levee
- Fishtrap Creek Levee
- Bertrand Creek Levee
- Sediment traps on Smith Creek, High Creek, & Swift Creek (pictured above)



# Whatcom County Public Works

## Key construction actions since 2021 include:

### Advanced 6 Major levee and capital projects

This includes:

- Cougar Creek Neevel Levee Improvement
- Ferndale Levee Improvement
- Lynden Levee Rehabilitation and Channel Realignment
- Glacier-Gallup Creeks Alluvial Fan
- Jones Creek Debris Flow Risk Reduction projects
- Fish Camp Integrated Fish-Flood project in partnership with the Nooksack Tribe



# Whatcom County Public Works

## Key construction actions since 2021 include:

In 2022, the County completed a pilot project known as the Nooksack River Side Channel Enhancement Pilot Project.

This integrated project was in response to the Nov 2021 flood and involved minor excavation of the inlet to an existing side channel to allow more flow into the side channel to reduce flooding in Everson

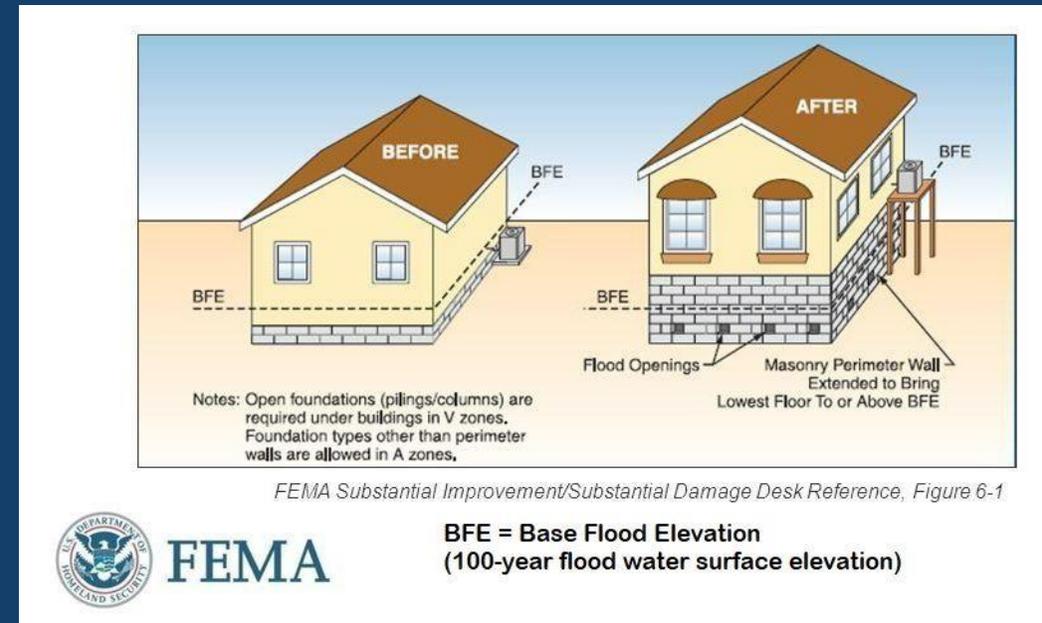


# Whatcom County Public Works

## Additional Flood Mitigation Efforts since 2021:

### Implemented a Hazard Mitigation Assistance program

- Reduced flood risk by acquiring 22 high-risk properties, relocating one home, and elevating 10 other homes through federal and state hazard mitigation grant programs.



# Whatcom County Public Works

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## Key planning actions since 2021 include:

### **Refocused Floodplain Integrated Planning (FLIP) process on Everson Overflow**

- Restructured FLIP - Formed 'Flow Split Reach Team' and expanded FLIPSC
- Design charrette in April 2022 – ideas developed
- Follow-up meeting in October 2022 – ideas evaluated and refined
- Progress meeting in April 2023 – concepts screening, technical work needed
- Sumas design charrette in March 2025 – Sumas mitigation and resiliency study is next step
- Meeting to present plan framework and components – planning for February 2026

### **Updated flood modeling and technical studies**

- Obtained updated river bathymetry and updated hydraulic model
- Completed sediment studies to evaluate impacts of future mitigation project near Everson
- Contracting for preliminary engineering studies for berms and Sumas resiliency study

### **Transboundary coordination with Canada**

- Washington and British Columbia governments initiated the Transboundary Flood Initiative (TFI)



# Whatcom County Sheriff's Office

- Sheriff's Remarks
- Implemented Changes Since 2021
- 2025 Flood Response



# Whatcom County Sheriff's Office

## Implemented Changes After 2021

- Through grants, DEM was able to support community recovery alongside partner organizations
- Purchased Response Equipment for local jurisdictions
  - Sandbag Machines
  - Sheltering/Response trailers
  - Floodgates
  - Variable Message Board Signs
  - Swiftwater Rescue Equipment
  - And Training
  - Emergency Operations Center Development



# Whatcom County Sheriff's Office

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## Implemented Changes Since 2021

- Increased staffing for the Division of Emergency Management
  - Added a Public Information Officer, Program Specialist, and Financial Accountant
  - Integrated Public Safety Radio Manager more deeply into DEM team for additional 24/7 duty officer rotation depth
- Increased public education campaigns for Alert and Warning
- Increased deliveries of responder training on Incident Command System and National Incident Management System
- Developed and Implemented training exercises to test response plans
- Increased engagement and coordination with response partners



# Whatcom County Sheriff's Office

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## Flood Response

Current timeline is getting broken up into a few portions of time

1. Lead Up & Coordination
2. Cresting & Rescue
3. Receding - Debris Management and Damage Assessment
4. Transition to Recovery



# Whatcom County Sheriff's Office

## 1. Lead Up & Coordination

- Began tracking storm Wednesday, Dec 3 alongside National Weather Service
- Email Updates out to WC Emergency Management Council daily from 12/4 - 12/8
- Daily Coordination Calls beginning 12/9
- Emergency Proclamation Signed 12/9
- EOC Activation
- Joint Information Center Activation

## 2. Cresting & Rescue

- Pre-staging of resources, apparatus, Search and Rescue
- County, City, State, Federal resources in EOC and in the field
- Evacuation notices coordinated with cities of Everson, Nooksack, Sumas, Ferndale and surrounding areas of the county



# Whatcom County Sheriff's Office

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## 3. Receding - Debris Management and Damage Assessment

- As floodwaters receded, EOC transitioned from Support role to Directing/Coordinating field activities
- Significant whole community support for debris management
  - Community Volunteers and Organizations
  - Private Industry Donations and Personnel Support
  - County, City, State, and Volunteers staffing EOC
- Began work assessing damage to homes, businesses, and infrastructure
- Connecting impacted survivors with services

## 4. Transition to Recovery

- Recovery is a marathon, not a sprint
- Farther along than at a similar time during 2021, which is a credit to the community's efforts to be better positioned for the next incident.



# Whatcom County Finance Division

- Finance Director Randy Rydel and Purchasing Coordinator Sara Winger were activated to the EOC
- Provided real-time guidance on emergency contracts and purchasing/procurement



# Whatcom County Finance Division

- Executed Emergency Contracts to support flood response (full report at future meeting)
- With FEMA reimbursement still not a given, not all proposed expenditures were approved.
- Our guiding philosophy was to meet the critical needs during the response, while ensuring there are resources for a long recovery.



# Next Steps

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## Recovery is ongoing

- Disaster Assistance Center (DAC) set for Jan 15th, 6pm-9pm at Nooksack Valley Middle School
- Human services assistance process is currently under review
- Impacted families strongly encouraged to fill out Damage Assessment Forms
- North Sound ACH connecting impacted people with basic needs (food, housing, etc)
- Dehumidifiers/Dryers/Trash Pumps/etc available to borrow at Everson Public Works
- County waived permit fees and expediated applications for emergency repairs
- Assessor's Office prepared to handle valuation changes
- Substantial Damage letters going out from Public Works

## Future Council presentations will delve into

- Flood mitigation projects to be pursued in the future
- A full after-action report

