

**WHATCOM COUNTY
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**

County Courthouse
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Bellingham, WA 98225-4082



Satpal Singh Sidhu
County Executive

Memorandum

To: Whatcom County Council
Through: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
From: Jed Holmes, Public Affairs Manager
CC: Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive
Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Director
Date: January 15, 2026
RE: State Capital Budget Request for Flood Hazard Mitigation

Whatcom County has seen three substantial flood events since 2020. These include major Nooksack River flooding in February 2020, the catastrophic November 2021 disaster and again major flooding in December 2025, when the river saw its highest crest ever recorded at Cedarville.

While damage assessments for the 2025 event have not been completed, preliminary assessments show that 1,248 homes were impacted, including 159 with major or destroyed damage. Within these broader impacts, two residences were destroyed as the Nooksack River overtopped its banks in the foothills, sweeping homes and outbuildings downriver. Related business and commerce losses are estimated in the millions.

On January 27, Whatcom County submitted a State Capital Budget request to support early-action items within the flood hazard mitigation plan developed through the Floodplain Integrated Planning (FLIP) process. These projects will reduce flood risks for communities across all reaches of the watershed. These actions are also intended to benefit fish. The artificial constriction of the river's path has degraded fish habitat, and projects such as levee setbacks and side channel creation will improve habitat for endangered salmon runs in the Nooksack watershed.

Project Areas

The request includes the following project areas:

1. Acquisition of key properties to support flood risk reduction and habitat restoration projects (\$5 million).
2. Advance design of projects to reduce the flood damages to Everson, Nooksack, and Sumas and improve habitat (\$4 million). Projects may include:
 - Widening the corridor near Everson and mitigating impacts
 - Everson and Nooksack berms
 - Flood walls/floodproofing for critical facilities (city halls, feed mill)
3. Advance design of emergency access and drainage improvement projects (\$4 million). Projects may include:

- Relocating/replacing tide gate on Jordan's Creek
- Elevating portions of key access routes to Lummi Nation
- Access improvements to Nooksack Tribal housing

4. Advance design of projects from Everson to Interstate 5 to address flooding and habitat impacts (\$2 million). Projects may include:

- Setting back levees at constrictions or other actions to mitigate flow increase from early action project and improve habitat

The request is sponsored by our 42nd Legislative District delegation – Senator Shewmake, Representative Rule and Representative Timmons.

Next Steps

The Executive's Office has been in regular communication our state delegation and key legislative staff in support of this request, and we will continue to work with our lobbyist Josh Weiss to advocate for this funding.

Next steps for the County Council could include:

- Motion indicating support for the request
- Joint letter signed by Council Chair and County Executive
- Direct advocacy with state legislators (emails, calls)

Please address any questions regarding this request to Jed Holmes, Public Affairs Manager (jholmes@co.whatcom.wa.us).