

Questions & Answers



Q. What is Community Floodplain Solutions (CFS)?

Community Floodplain Solutions (CFS) is a collaborative approach to integrated floodplain management. The project emerged from a partnership between Snohomish County and the Sustainable Lands Strategy (SLS) – a stakeholder group convened by the county, farmers, tribes, environmental groups and others dedicated to working together to achieve gains for farms, fish and flood management.

Q. Can you explain what integrated floodplain management is?

Integrated floodplain management is a holistic way to manage river resources that benefit diverse interests. A healthy floodplain is a place where both people and nature thrive. In order to be successful, partners and willing landowners must work together to put forward ideas that protect the health and livelihood of a more resilient floodplain community.

Q. Where is the project location?

The Community Floodplain Solutions–Sky Valley project covers approximately 2,550 acres along the Lower Skykomish River approximately 3.5 miles east of Monroe at river mile (RM) 9, and extending upriver to RM 16 next to the Sultan city limits.

Q. Why was the location chosen?

The lower Skykomish River, near Sultan, has a history of flooding that frequently threatens property and forces the closures of local roads. Repetitive loss properties are scattered along the reach of the Skykomish River and more than twenty properties are currently threatened by bank erosion with some experiencing erosion rates of 9-25 feet per year. Sky Valley is also a vital agricultural center and home to critical salmon habitat that is essential for the recovery of Chinook and the Southern Resident Orca.

Q. Are your efforts only focused along the Skykomish River?

CFS hopes this will be the first of many such projects and partners are working to establish an Integration Team collaboration that engages critical partners to scope and design projects and look at project interactions and trade-offs in multiple locations throughout the Skykomish. The county and SLS partners have been focusing on areas affected by flooding in the four major river reaches of the Snohomish Basin in Snohomish County—Lower Skykomish River, Lower Stillaguamish River, Snohomish River and Estuary, and the North Fork Stillaguamish River. The Stillaguamish Tribe is undergoing similar work in the Stillaguamish River floodplains.

Q. How is the project funded?

This CFS-Sky Valley project is funded through a \$4.8 million award from the Washington State Department of Ecology's Floodplains by Design (FbD) grant program. Snohomish County Public Works Surface Water Management and partners will provide \$1.93 million in local and federal matching funds to the grant.

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Q. What will you accomplish with all that funding?

The goals of the program are:

- Improve emergency access and reduce flood-related road closures
- Remove three fish passage barriers and culverts, which will improve access to 2.6 miles of stream habitat
- Restore up to 30 acres of habitat along the Skykomish riverbanks
- Protect up to 200 acres of floodplain land for future restoration and long-term agriculture uses
- Model, assess, and map river conditions for future projects
- Complete design for an integrated floodway project and three agriculture resiliency projects
- Educate and learn from residents about living in a dynamic floodplain to better understand future river migration risks

Q. How much time will all these projects take?

The projects identified are targeted for completion by 2023. The county and partners are currently seeking additional funding to provide relief options along additional areas of the Skykomish River valley.

Q. Who are the CFS project partners and stakeholders?

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| <input type="checkbox"/> City of Sultan | <input type="checkbox"/> The Nature Conservancy–Washington Chapter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Land and business owners in Sky Valley | <input type="checkbox"/> Tulalip Tribes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snohomish County (Public Works, Agriculture, Parks, Department of Emergency Management) | <input type="checkbox"/> Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable Land Strategy (SLS) | <input type="checkbox"/> Washington Farmland Trust |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snohomish Conservation District | <input type="checkbox"/> Washington State Department of Ecology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snohomish County PUD | |

Q. What effect can landowners have on CFS?

The voluntary participation of landowners determines the success of CFS. The purpose of integrated floodplain management is to find mutually beneficial solutions. Grant dollars cannot be used to improve private property without the consent of its owners. Through acquisitions and easements, the county can address river conditions like erosion and channel migration that are taking over property without the consent of owners. As flooding conditions worsen, steps are required to protect people and the environment.

Q. How are flooding conditions worsening?

Since 1962, there have been 18 floods of such record proportions that they met the qualifications for Presidentially Declared Disasters. Typically, the county experiences major flooding every three to five years. The last flood of impact was on November 17, 2015. Heavy rains on this date caused high flows countywide, but the most damage occurred in the Skykomish River floodplain, south of Sultan. Six repetitive loss areas have developed and been mapped in the Lower Skykomish River Reach. Three of these areas are between Sultan and Monroe. By using comprehensive climate and river modeling data available today, solutions are being carefully weighed to plan relief for property owners living in the most vulnerable areas.

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Q. What are some of the ways partners plan to provide relief?

There are many options to consider. While grant funds will not pay for the installation of rip rap due its adverse effects on salmon habitat, planting vegetation and installing wood fencing along riverbanks can help shore up eroding banks and slow the movement of water. CFS also hopes to assess areas suitable for reconnecting river channels and setting back levees that alleviate stress points along the river during high flood flows. In addition, project partners are seeking ways to improve flood water conveyance by replacing failed culverts and raising sections of the roadway. In some cases, the most cost-effective measure may be to remove people and structures from high hazard areas of the floodplain providing long-term risk reduction.

Q. Can you give examples of how you would work with a property owner in high hazard areas?

Through CFS, the county and partners like Washington Farmland Trust are piloting some new incentive programs that allow willing property owners to receive financial compensation for allowing all or a portion of their property to be repurposed for agriculture use or habitat restoration. In these cases, property owners keep the land and agree to remove development rights from the parcel. That means no structures will be built in the river's path, but owners still have full access to the property and are free to enjoy the beauty or economic viability of the land whether they wish to plant crops, manage livestock, or allow project partners to plant riparian buffers along riverbanks.

In other cases, CFS may be able to facilitate property acquisitions or buy-outs to help property owners completely move from an area of repetitive flood loss. The county follows federal and state guidelines to acquire eligible flood damaged properties. Property owners will not be forced to sell property and willing participants who qualify will receive fair market value as established by an authorized appraiser. The key to integrated floodplain management is finding mutually agreeable solutions. All land negotiations would work from this principle.

Q. What is the process for working with the county?

Part of the foundation of CFS is community engagement and outreach. We are planning a number of events but have had to delay several of them due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also looking at virtual engagement options so please reach out for more information. To start a conversation, call (425) 262-2443 or email CFS.info@snoco.org.

Q. Can you explain how CFS is using river modeling data to assess future hazards along the Skykomish River?

CFS will integrate comprehensive scientific data to help identify locations where habitat and infrastructure may be vulnerable to changing river and flooding conditions. Studies funded by this effort include:

- Hydraulic (river) and Hydrologic (climate) modeling will analyze future climate change scenarios on river flow, projecting outcomes from minor to catastrophic flood events
- Geomorphic analysis, hazard mapping and an infrastructure assessment will evaluate the relationship between fish habitat, flood hazards and human impacts
- The information collected will be used to educate the public and prioritize projects like voluntary acquisitions and channel migration easements. With a better understanding of the risks in the Sultan Reach floodplain, multi-benefit projects can be developed that safely allow the river room to move while providing options for landowners and other stakeholders.

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Q. Does CFS impact Mann Road and Ben Howard Road projects?

Initially, CFS planned to allocate funds for the road elevations projects on Mann Road and Ben Howard Road. However, the construction window for Mann and Ben Howard Road projects now extends beyond the grant funding window for CFS. Surface Water Management has pledged additional funding to help ensure construction projects move forward on Mann and Ben Howard Road.

Q. How does CFS benefit salmon restoration efforts?

Correcting three failing fish passage barrier culverts on Haystack Creek will improve access to 2.6 miles of forested upstream habitat important for salmon species seeking refuge from winter flood flows. This action leverages grant dollars and complements a larger restoration effort on South Slough and Haystack Creek undertaken by the Snohomish Conservation District and partners. Additionally, CFS will fund the continuation of previous work with landowners in South Slough and Haystack Creek to plant at least 30 acres of riparian buffer. There are also plans to protect 200 acres of floodplain land for salmon restoration and agriculture benefits.

Q. Can you describe any agriculture resiliency projects underway?

The Snohomish Conservation District (SCD), with robust input from the agricultural community, has completed an Agriculture Resilience Plan (2019) to help this sector prepare for and adapt to changing climatic conditions. SCD researched and analyzed the impact of sea level rise on groundwater levels and saltwater intrusion, and summarized climate change impacts to crop growing conditions on agricultural productivity in the county. CFS plans to leverage the Snohomish Conservation District's Agriculture Resilience Plan and new river modeling data to develop 30 percent project designs that help ensure successful farm production in the area. As noted above, CFS already identified 200 acres of river property that may support agriculture viability in the future.