CHIMACUM CREEK MANAGEMENT & IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What prompted this planning effort?

A lack of Chimacum Creek drainage system management and maintenance over the past couple of decades has resulted in marginal farmland and degraded habitat conditions. Chimacum Creek is a very unnatural stream system that was modified in the early part of the last century to facilitate agricultural development.

The Chimacum Drainage District was formed in 1919 to implement and manage drainage improvements. However, the drainage district went inactive in 1974. Since that time, maintenance work has been the responsibility of individual landowners. Maintenance has been inconsistent, both spatially and temporally.

Further compounding the problems are widespread reed canarygrass, which chokes the streams and ditches, and thriving populations of beaver that destroy woody vegetation along the stream and build dams.

2. What is the goal of this planning effort?

The goal is to identify and detail management and maintenance practices and special projects that will help reduce flooding impacts to farmland, while also improving water quality and habitat conditions. With input and review by regulatory agencies, we envision a relatively simple and streamlined permitting process for regular maintenance activities, such as reed canarygrass control and beaver dam management.

The plan is modeled after a plan template developed by Whatcom Conservation District and described in their *Drainage Management Guide for Whatcom County Drainage Improvement Districts*. Whatcom County drainage districts, County Public Works, County Planning and Community Services, the Washington departments of Fish & Wildlife and Ecology, area tribes, and federal agencies contributed to development of the guide.

3. What are the possible benefits of this project?

Drainage system management is necessary to continue farming in much of Chimacum Valley. Having a management plan that spells out the activities to be implemented will facilitate fund raising and permitting. It will also help the community understand what will be done and when it will be done, as well as what it will likely cost. This will help the community decide the best mechanisms for plan implementation, whether it be reactivation of the drainage district or some other mechanism. Input from regulatory agencies on plan development will facilitate permitting, especially if the work is implemented by reputable and trusted organizations.

4. Who will lead the implementation of the plan?

It is yet to be determined how the plan will be implemented. However, in August of 2023 the Board of County Commissioners voted to not dissolve the inactive Chimacum Drainage District, and initiated a public engagement process to determine if the district should be reactivated. The plan will include an examination of drainage maintenance and special project funding needs, potential funding sources, and potential implementation mechanisms.

Potential plan implementation mechanisms include:

- the current system – individual landowners take responsibility for maintenance, including securing permits;
- reactivation of the drainage district;
- creation of a new entity.

Potential roles and responsibilities for partner organizations will also be examined. This could include assisting landowners with permit acquisition or serving as the permittee on behalf of landowners, securing grant funding for projects and managing projects, and/or providing administrative assistance to the drainage district or other implementing entity.

5. What are the main issues for the creek and the drainage?

The main issues relate to an excessively high water table and prolonged flooding/inundation that adversely impacts farmland and recently restored riparian forest buffers. Other issues include impaired water quality (bacterial contamination, high water temperature, low dissolved oxygen), degraded fish habitat, and poor-quality wetland habitat. Rampant reed canarygrass growth in stream and ditch channels and beaver dams are the primary causes.

6. Why is reed canarygrass a problem?

Reed canarygrass (RCG) is a perennial forage grass species that is adapted to wet soil conditions that was introduced to the area midway through the last century. It is a productive forage species, but its palatability declines rapidly as it matures. And harvesting/grazing early in the season can be a challenge due to wet soil conditions.

It is highly invasive, aggressively spreading by both rhizomes and seed. It invades wetlands and shallow, slow-flowing waterways, causing ecological problems. It can grow on channel bottoms, and the six-foot-tall stems fall over narrow waterways, creating thick mats of vegetation and rhizomes across the channel. It outcompetes desirable vegetation, creating challenges for native tree and shrub establishment.

Vegetative growth in stream channels impedes flow, exacerbating flooding problems, and causing sediment to settle out and build up in the channel. When vegetative matter dies in waterways, its decomposition robs the water of dissolved oxygen. Channel infestations can be so thick that they inhibit fish passage.

7. What has been done thus far to address these issues?

In 2023, the board of county commissioners voted to designate the drainage district inactive and initiate a community engagement process to determine whether the district should be reactivated or dissolved. The Jefferson County Conservation District is working on the management plan to help inform the community about management options, costs, potential implementation organizations, and possible sources of funding for implementation.

This planning process is going hand in hand with the community engagement process. A first draft analysis of drainage issues has been completed and presented to the community for input/feedback. We've relied mostly on existing studies and analysis of orthophoto imagery for our analysis. One of the main sources of information is the *Chimacum Creek Protection and Restoration Plan*, which is available on our website. That document, prepared by the North Olympic Salmon Coalition, includes restoration recommendations that we will incorporate into our plan.

8. How does this relate to the Port of Port Townsend's planning effort underway for the Short Farm?

The Short Farm is the largest single ownership of farmland in the county. It is also probably impacted more than any other farm by flooding/inundation. The Port is going through their own separate planning process for that property; however, what they come up with could serve as a case study for other areas of the watershed.

9. Who should participate in this process?

Anyone with an interest in the future management of Chimacum Creek. Also, if the drainage district is reactivated or another entity is created, it is likely that fees would be assessed on properties in the district to generate revenue to carry out the proposed management and maintenance activities.

10. Where can I get more information?

Additional information and resources, including watershed analysis information and project updates will be posted on the Jefferson County Conservation District website: https://www.jeffersoncd.org/chimacum-creek.

Contact the County's consultant, Vivian Ericson with Peak Sustainability, to be added to a distribution list: vivian@peaksustainability.com, 650-644-7247.