



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, PORTLAND DISTRICT  
PO BOX 2946  
PORTLAND, OR 97208-2946

The Honorable Jeff Wilson  
Washington State Senate  
19th Legislative District  
PO Box 40419  
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Washington State Legislators and Local Government Officials:

Thank you for your letter dated October 10, 2025, concerning the sediment issues in the Toutle, Cowlitz, and Columbia Rivers. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Portland District, continues to, within its authorities, operate and maintain the Mount St. Helens Project (Project), including the Sediment Retention Structure (SRS), to manage sediment from the volcanic debris avalanche. USACE continues to ensure that the levels of protection (LOP) afforded to downstream communities, established by Congress in Section 339 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, are met through implementation of the plan in the 2019 Limited Reevaluation Report (LRR).

In response to points raised in your letter, I would like to provide the following information.

a. The levees along the lower Cowlitz River in the communities of Kelso, Longview, Lexington, and Castle Rock are still meeting the authorized LOP. The latest surveys that were completed in 2024 confirmed this status and information has been provided to Cowlitz County and involved District officials.

b. Although the sediment trapping efficiency of the SRS has decreased, USACE has completed designs and advertised a contract to raise the spillway crest an additional 10-feet as part of implementing the 2019 update to the long-term sediment management plan. USACE previously raised the spillway crest 7-feet in 2012, and this modification effectively trapped sediment in support of LOP for over 10 years. We anticipate that this next spillway crest raise will be just as effective.

c. Your letter also addressed concerns about how the Cowlitz and Toutle Rivers are responding to current conditions. USACE is aware of the sand bars that have formed at the confluence of the Toutle and Cowlitz Rivers, and how the Cowlitz River is migrating west at that point which is causing bank erosion. USACE has met with Cowlitz County representatives and provided information regarding other authorities and programs by which USACE could potentially assist in addressing erosion or other water resource challenges.

d. USACE recognizes the importance of the lower Columbia River portion of the Columbia and Lower Willamette Rivers navigation project, and how it supports regional

and national economic benefits. USACE performs annual maintenance dredging of the federal navigation channel (FNC) and there have been no recent channel restrictions for vessels transiting the system. USACE also operates a sump at the mouth of the Cowlitz River (as advanced maintenance dredging) to directly capture sediment from the Cowlitz River before it enters the FNC.

USACE will continue implementing the long-term sediment management plan from the 2019 LRR as funding permits. The plan includes a series of measures to adaptively manage sediment and maintain the authorized LOP to the downstream levees. The timing for implementing specific measures is adaptive in nature and based on USACE's annual monitoring to ensure LOP will be met. These specific measures are described in the LRR found at: <https://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/Locations/Mount-St-Helens/> and include spillway crest raises, grade building structures, and dredging of the lower Cowlitz River (as needed to maintain LOP).

In conclusion, thank you again for your letter and USACE looks forward to continuing to work on this very complex sediment management problem.

Sincerely,



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Larry D. Caswell, Jr., PE, PMP  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
District Commander

cc:

Jennifer Wills, Longview City Manager  
Andrew Hamilton, Kelso City Manager  
Richard Dahl, Cowlitz County Commissioner  
Steve Rader, Cowlitz County Commissioner  
Steven Ferrell, Cowlitz County Commissioner  
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William A Fashing, Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Executive Director  
Paul Helenberg, Castle Rock Mayor  
Spencer Boudreau, Longview Mayor  
Veryl Anderson, Kelso Mayor  
David Vorse, Castle Rock Public Works Director  
Representative Ed Orcutt, 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative District  
Representative Jim Walsh, 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative District  
Representative Joel McEntire, 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative District  
Representative Peter Abbarno, 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative District  
Senator John Braun, 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

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