



# Washington State Legislature

October 10, 2025

Lt. General William Graham, Jr.  
Commanding General  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
441 G Street NW  
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Dear Lt. General Graham,

We write to you with deep concern regarding the accelerating sedimentation issues in the Toutle, Cowlitz, and Columbia River systems caused by the continuing activity at Mount St. Helens. As state legislators and local government officials representing the residents, businesses, and communities most directly affected, we urge the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to take prompt and coordinated action to safeguard public safety, critical infrastructure, and economic vitality.

## Current Challenges

Mount St. Helens continues to shed approximately 2.8 million cubic yards of material annually above the Sediment Retention Structure (SRS). The SRS, once an effective tool, has declined to only 16% efficiency as of 2024. In addition, unstable riverbanks contributed another 2.2 million cubic yards of erosion last year, bringing the total annual sediment load to 5 million cubic yards. Of this, less than 500,000 cubic yards were captured by the SRS, while 600,000 cubic yards settled in the upper Cowlitz River and nearly 4 million cubic yards entered the Columbia River.

This unchecked sedimentation has had cascading consequences:

- Reduced level of protection for the Castle Rock and Rocky Point levee systems, now nearing dangerously low thresholds.
- Sandbars consuming flood capacity while forcing destructive energy into already unstable banks, resulting in the loss of public and private property.
- Severe damage to drinking water, wastewater, and transportation infrastructure—imposing multimillion-dollar burdens on taxpayers.
- Degraded water quality for human use, fish, and wildlife, with sediment lacking the organic material necessary to support healthy ecosystems.
- Navigation challenges on the Columbia River that threaten global commerce and regional economic competitiveness.

Flooding is a recurring threat in Washington, and the weakened condition of these systems heightens the potential for serious impacts. A single above-average event under current conditions could devastate more than 90,000 residents. Timely action is critical.

## Recommended Actions

We urge the Corps to act quickly and decisively:

- **Short-term:** Raise the SRS spillway, restoring capacity and buying approximately ten years to develop long-range solutions. Dredge the mouth of the Toutle River and the Cowlitz River corridor to the Columbia, reinstating the sump constructed in the 1980s.
- **Medium-term:** Stabilize riverbanks through engineered measures and vegetation to reduce ongoing erosion and sediment contribution.
- **Long-term:** Develop solutions upstream of the SRS to capture or remove sediment at the source, allowing rivers to heal naturally and improving fish and wildlife habitat.

## Cooperation, Authorization, and Funding

We commend the work of the Spirit Lake/Toutle River Collaborative, which has brought agencies together in new ways. Yet progress remains constrained by rigid authorization limits and a tendency to “stay in the box.” The Corps’ current authorization focuses narrowly on flood protection, leaving critical issues such as infrastructure destruction, water quality, and ecological degradation beyond reach. We urge an expansion of Corps authorization to reflect today’s realities, paired with adequate appropriations at both federal and state levels.

## Conclusion

This is not merely a technical issue—it is a matter of quality of life, economic stability, and environmental stewardship. The mountain is indifferent to our governmentally imposed limitations. We must respond with the same urgency and creativity that the situation demands.

We respectfully ask for your leadership in raising the SRS, restoring dredging operations, advancing stabilization projects, and pursuing the expanded authorization and appropriations necessary for lasting solutions. The people of southwest Washington—some 90,000 residents—are depending on your support and resolve.

Thank you for your attention and for your service to our communities. We look forward to working with you in pursuit of a solution that protects lives, property, and the natural environment for generations to come. The broad support from undersigned community leaders reflects how important a remedy is for the well-being of our community.


Sincerely,



Senator Jeff Wilson  
19<sup>th</sup> Legislative District



Representative Jim Walsh  
19<sup>th</sup> Legislative District



Representative Joel McEntire  
19<sup>th</sup> Legislative District



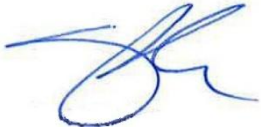
Senator John Braun  
20<sup>th</sup> Legislative District



Representative Ed Orcutt  
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Representative Peter Abbarno  
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Steve Rader  
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Steven Ferrell  
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