



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**
Portland District



WILLAMETTE VALLEY SYSTEM OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

CHAPTER 6 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

*Willamette Valley System Operations and Maintenance
Final Environmental Impact Statement*

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CHAPTER 6 - PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

**CHAPTER 6 HAS BEEN REVISED FROM THE DEIS
REPEATED INFORMATION HAS BEEN DELETED
INSERTION OF LARGE AMOUNTS OF TEXT IS IDENTIFIED; MINOR EDITS ARE NOT DENOTED**

Summary of changes from the DEIS:

- Information has been added to clarify the purpose of public involvement in Section 6.1, Introduction.
- Section 6.6, Draft EIS Public Outreach Summary, has been updated to provide additional information and clarifications regarding public notifications and document availability, public meetings, and stakeholder meetings.
- Table 6-2, Outreach Events during the Draft EIS Public Review Period, is presented at the end of this chapter.
- Terminology has been clarified.



6.1 Introduction

THE DEIS HAS BEEN MODIFIED TO REVISE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IN THE FEIS

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) emphasizes that public scrutiny is essential to implementing the act (40 CFR 1500.1(b)). To promote this objective, NEPA requires lead agencies to encourage and facilitate public involvement in decisions that affect the quality of the human environment (40 CFR 1500.2(d)). USACE is the lead agency for development of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (Section 2.1, Alternatives, Introduction).

Public involvement begins with scoping, which is the process of soliciting input from tribes and stakeholders such as the public (both private citizens and non-governmental organizations) and other agencies primarily to identify significant issues related to the Proposed Action (40 CFR 15001.7). Scoping also gives the lead agency perspectives from various stakeholders, helps to develop aspects of the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action, and assists with development of preliminary alternatives to the Proposed Action.

Draft Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) must be made available for the public to review and comment on via a Notice of Availability posted to the Federal Register. Public meetings can be held during the public comment period to describe the proposal and to provide an opportunity for the public to ask questions and make comments. The comments received and

any underlying documents must be made available to the public per the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552).

6.1.1 Public Scoping Outreach

USACE began public outreach for development of this EIS early in the planning process with press releases, a newspaper article in the Eugene, Oregon, newspaper the *Register Guard*, and a public-facing EIS website. Flyers and handouts were posted at USACE properties and distributed at local Willamette Valley events, and stakeholders were notified of EIS developments via email¹. USACE also organized a presentation for the North Santiam, McKenzie, Middle Fork, and Coast Fork Watershed Councils and the Association of Oregon Counties.

6.1.1.1 Notification of Public Scoping Meetings

Scoping for the EIS formally began on April 1, 2019, with publication of a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register (Vol. 84, No. 62, pp. 12,237–12,238). The Notice of Intent described USACE's intent to prepare this EIS to address continued operations and maintenance of the Willamette Valley System (WVS) in accordance with Congressionally authorized purposes while meeting ESA obligations to avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of ESA-listed species (Section 1.10, Congressionally Authorized Purposes; Section 2.4, Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action).

Public comments were accepted until June 28, 2019. The Notice of Intent also notified the public of the scoping meetings from June 4 to 13, 2019. The meetings were also advertised in 15 newspapers, press releases, flyers, the EIS website, email distributions, and social media.

6.1.1.2 Public Scoping Meetings

The WVS is located in Oregon's Willamette Valley, which includes a mix of metropolitan and rural communities. Five scoping meetings were held at various locations throughout the Willamette Valley to provide an opportunity for interested stakeholders from different communities to attend (Appendix P, Public Scoping). In addition to a presentation, an open house format was used to encourage discussion and information sharing and to ensure the public had opportunities to speak with USACE representatives.

Meeting participants included private citizens; utility board/councils; watershed councils; farm associations; non-governmental organizations; city, state, and Federal representatives; and elected officials. An average of 16 people attended each scoping meeting.

¹ An EIS distribution list was developed as a database of over 2,000 individuals. Data include contact information for interested stakeholders and people who requested to be added to receive EIS updates. The distribution list was updated throughout the EIS process. Anyone can request to be added to this list.

Materials Provided at Public Meetings

Informational posters Public comment brochure Scoping informational brochure
Public scoping meeting handout providing instructions on use of the public comment portal

6.1.2 Scoping Comments

A total of 92 correspondence documents were received via email, mail, comment brochures that were distributed and then collected at meetings, and the public comment portal. Many of the correspondence documents contained multiple comments on different topics.

A total of 384 comments were received from private citizens, non-governmental organizations, government agencies, and tribes (Table 6-1). To ensure all comments were identified and properly reviewed, the comments were first assigned a comment identification number and documented in a database. The comments were then organized, analyzed, and categorized according to six topics:

1. Alternatives
2. Congressionally authorized purpose
3. EIS general
4. Environmental effects
5. Mitigation
6. Not a comment about the EIS (e.g., out of scope)

Table 6-1. Public Scoping Comments Received by Topic.

Topic	Number of Comments Received
Alternatives	183
Congressionally Authorized Purpose	10
EIS General	86
Environmental Effects	90
Mitigation	5
Not a Comment about the EIS	10
Total	384

Comments were further categorized by sub-topics (e.g., ESA-listed species and/or compliance, flood risk management, NEPA process, water storage and allocation) and subsequently used to inform the scope of analysis, alternatives development, and identification of potentially significant issues to be addressed in the Draft EIS.

END REVISED TEXT

The Willamette Valley System Operation and Maintenance Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Public Scoping Report includes more details on the scoping process and comments, a database of comments received, and all scoping materials (Appendix P, Public Scoping Report).

6.2 Key Issues and Resource Concerns

The NEPA public scoping process resulted in identification of issues important to WVS stakeholders. The following list of key issues and resource concerns associated with the proposed alternatives is not all-inclusive.

6.2.1 Endangered Species Act

The largest number of comments received for any single issue or resource concern (136 comments of 384 total) involved ESA-listed species and compliance with the ESA, mainly with regard to Upper Willamette River spring Chinook salmon, Upper Willamette River steelhead, and bull trout. Concerns were raised about how dams would affect anadromous fish, including fish migration patterns, water conditions affecting fish passage and fish populations, and general ecosystem effects.

6.2.2 Flood Risk Management

There were 48 comments pertaining to flood risk management. The scoping process identified concerns and suggestions related to retaining or improving the current WVS to assist with flood risk. Concerns in this area related to both preserving economic activities and human resources within the WVS and balancing flood risk mitigation with the need to ensure the availability of appropriate fish and wildlife habitat.

6.2.3 NEPA Process

There were 49 comments pertaining to the NEPA Process. Commenters focused on the scope of the EIS, the review process, and how the EIS may affect other ongoing USACE NEPA analyses within the WVS. Cumulative effects to natural resources and ecosystems resulting from operations and maintenance of the WVS were identified as a concern. Commenters identified elements that should potentially be included in the scope of the EIS, such as recent research on fish habitats; water allocation and storage; and streamflow as it relates to boating, maintenance of hydropower infrastructure, and water quality.

6.2.4 Water Storage and Allocation

There were 48 comments pertaining to water storage and allocation. Comments were received advocating for and against adjustments to water storage capacity and allocation. Commenters suggested that water allocation and storage should be designed to meet increasing irrigation demands. Concerns were voiced about potential adverse effects to the local community should

water storage allocation be decreased. Some commenters raised concerns that water storage and allocation changes could negatively affect fish populations and habitat.

6.2.5 Water Quality

There were 25 comments pertaining to water quality. Comments were received concerning the potential effect of operations and maintenance activities on the transformation or migration of contaminants found within the WVS. Comments called for an assessment of water quality issues and presentation of data associated with likely effects to water quality from proposed alternatives. Some commenters requested water quality sampling to ensure public safety regarding drinking water. Overall, comments called for consideration of water quality issues, both physical and chemical, within the WVS.

6.2.6 Recreation

There were 24 comments pertaining to recreation. Comments were received advocating for recreational opportunities such as through recreational releases for boating and whitewater paddling as well as for sailing. Commenters also identified concerns with the recreational effects of algal blooms, commenting that any proposed changes to reservoir levels could affect recreational use of the WVS and jobs associated with those recreational opportunities. The comments included discussion of the local and regional economies tied to recreational opportunities in the WVS. Commenters also suggested USACE consider and evaluate the recreational effects of fishing on ESA-listed species.

6.3 Interagency Coordination

Following scoping, USACE held monthly meetings with the Cooperating Agencies to provide regular updates to the EIS status and to solicit feedback (Appendix L, Cooperating Agencies). Additionally, in April of 2020, USACE held workshop meetings with Cooperating Agencies to present information about the EIS and to solicit feedback. These meetings are summarized below.

- On April 9, 2020, a webinar was held with USACE, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, NMFS², BOR, BPA, EPA, ODFW, ODEQ, and ODA to discuss results of developing Biological Opinion measures into preliminary alternatives.
- On April 15, 2020, a webinar was held with USACE, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, NMFS, BOR, BPA, EPA, ODFW, ODEQ, ODA, and OWRD in which USACE presented EIS context, the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, review of the alternative development process, and a status and overview of the preliminary alternatives.

² NMFS = National Marine Fisheries Service, BOR = U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, BPA = Bonneville Power Administration, EPA = Environmental Protection Agency, ODFW = Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, ODEQ = Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, ODA = Oregon Department of Agriculture, OWRD = Oregon Water Resources Department

- On April 24, 2020, a webinar was held with USACE, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, NMFS, BOR, BPA, EPA, ODFW, ODEQ, ODA, and OWRD in which USACE provided information regarding the No-action Alternative.

6.4 Tribal Consultation

Executive Order 13175 requires Federal departments and agencies to consult with Indian Tribal Governments when considering policies that are anticipated to have substantial direct effects on one or more Indian tribe, on the relationship between the Federal Government and Indian tribes, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities between the Federal Government and Indian tribes (65 FR 67249). USACE committed from the outset to consult with Federally recognized tribes throughout the EIS development process. Tribal consultation for this EIS development began in 2018 and is detailed in Appendix O, Tribal Coordination and Perspectives.

6.5 Additional Public Outreach

In 2021, USACE released a publicly accessible Virtual Room, an interactive website organized as a three-dimensional public meeting room with clickable “boards” that provided information summarizing the status of the EIS. The information provided included an overview of the WVS EIS background and process, including the alternatives formulation process.

The Virtual Room also included an interactive map that provided descriptions of actions proposed under each alternative and allowed the visitor to explore geographic locations of where actions were proposed under each alternative.

Following release of the Virtual Room, USACE held an informational public meeting, during which USACE subject matter experts presented the alternatives and the alternatives formulation process current at the time. The presentation also provided an overview of each alternative, including the actions that make up the alternative and their proposed locations.

Over 25 members of the public attended the virtual meeting. USACE fielded questions from attendees during the meeting, but no formal comments were recorded as this was intended only as an informational meeting to update the public on EIS development status.

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6.6 Draft EIS Public Outreach Summary

6.6.1 Notifications and Document Availability

A Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register to notify the public of the release of the Draft EIS for review and comment. The Notice of Availability was published on November 25, 2022, and marked the start of the 45-day public comment period. The 45-day public comment period was noticed to close on January 19, 2023. The public comment period was

later extended on January 6, 2023, to a total of 90 days, which was also noticed in the Federal Register. The final 90-day comment period was closed on February 23, 2023.

The Draft EIS was made available for review on the USACE Portland District website. Additionally, eight hard copies were made available at local libraries throughout the Willamette Valley. Per Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations, USACE requested review comments from Cooperating Agencies; tribes; Federal, state, and local agencies; parties/organizations that may be interested or affected by the Proposed Action; and the public (40 CFR 1503.1).

6.6.2 Public Meetings

USACE conducted public outreach during the Draft EIS public comment period early in the process by publishing press releases, updating the EIS website³, and providing email notifications and updates through the EIS distribution list to various stakeholders. Outreach events were also conducted throughout the public comment period (Table 6-2). These events included two public meetings held virtually over the Webex platform as well as four in-person public meetings.

All six public meetings had a total cumulative attendance of 259 participants as Federal, state, and local agency representatives; representatives from interested stakeholder groups; non-governmental organizations; tribal members; and members of the general public. Participants learned of the public meetings from a variety of outlets, including the USACE EIS website; email announcements; flyers; news articles; social media posts; emails from other agency and stakeholder group distribution emails as well as friends, family, and colleagues.

The timing, frequency, and duration of outreach events were closely considered by the USACE Public Involvement Specialist and Portland District leadership. The timing for public meetings was targeted for the start and late middle of the public comment period. All meetings were held for a 2-hour block to allow time for a presentation and a question-and-answer period.

Virtual meetings were held as an opportunity for a diverse group of interested stakeholders to attend a public meeting who may have been precluded from attending an in-person meeting due to travel constraints or health concerns related to a public setting during the pandemic. One meeting was held in the evening and one was held during the lunch hour to provide participants meeting time options.

Virtual meetings were scheduled for within the first weeks of the release of the Draft EIS. The purpose of these meetings was to provide an overview of the Draft EIS organization and content to assist interested stakeholders with navigating the large and complex document. Virtual meetings also covered how and by when to submit public comments. The virtual

³ <https://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/Locations/Willamette-Valley/System-Evaluation-EIS/>

meeting format included a presentation followed by a question-and-answer period with USACE subject matter experts who worked on development of the Draft EIS.

The in-person meetings were held later in the public comment period but with over a month remaining in the comment period. This was intended to allow interested stakeholders to learn more about the Draft EIS and have their questions answered to inform development of comments.

Locations for the in-person meetings were chosen to provide attendance opportunities within the broad EIS analysis area, from the southern to the northern end of the Willamette Valley, Oregon (Table 6-2). They also included metropolitan areas (Salem, Eugene, and Springfield, Oregon) as well as rural areas (Sweet Home/Lebanon). Each location was chosen based on its proximity to WVS dams where key issues of concern were identified during past outreach activities (e.g., public scoping). Meeting times alternated between evenings and afternoons to provide a variety of scheduling opportunities for interested participants.

The in-person meeting format included a presentation followed by over an hour of an open forum to meet with various USACE subject matter experts (e.g., ESA species/compliance, recreation, hydropower, water supply, etc.).

Additionally, USACE maintained and updated the existing Virtual Room with new information on the preferred alternative and the public comment period. USACE also released media announcements, socials posts, and posted timely updates on the EIS webpage as they became available (e.g., locations of libraries with hard copies of the Draft EIS once distributed). Public information updates included the release date of the Draft EIS for public comment, the public comment period extension, and the time and locations of EIS public meetings.

6.6.3 Interested Stakeholder Meetings

USACE staff presented Draft EIS information at several standing public meetings held by interested stakeholders, including the Linn and Lane County Commissioners meeting, the North Santiam Watershed Summit, a Salem Creekside Rotary Club meeting, and fishing guide association meetings (Table 6-2). The interested stakeholder-specific meetings provided an opportunity for these interested parties to interface with USACE staff in a forum smaller than the in-person public meetings and a targeted stakeholder outreach opportunity on the Proposed Action and the NEPA process.

6.6.4 Public Comments and Responses

A summary of the public comments and responses is provided in Appendix V, Draft EIS Public Comments and Responses.

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Table 6-2. Outreach Events During the Draft EIS Public Review Period.

Date	Outreach Tool	Description
10/24/22	Interested Stakeholder Meetings	Annual North Santiam Watershed Summit (open to the public). In-person information session providing and overview of the WVS Draft EIS and public comment period. Included question and answer period with USACE subject matter experts.
11/22/22	Press Release	“Corps seeking public comment on Willamette Valley Draft Programmatic Environmental Statement” https://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/Media/Public-Notices/Article/3226142/corps-seeking-public-comment-on-willamette-valley-draft-programmatic-environment/
11/23/22	Email notification via distribution list	Notice to email distribution list of the Draft EIS availability for public review and comment.
11/25/22	Notice of Availability	Notice in the Federal Register of the Draft EIS availability for public review and comment.
11/30/22	Email notification via distribution list	Public meeting information notice.
December 2022	Interested Stakeholder Meetings	McKenzie Flyfishers, McKenzie River Guides Association, McKenzie River, Linn County Commissioner Meeting, and Lane County Commissioner Meeting. In-person information session providing an overview of the WVS Draft EIS and public comment period. Included question and answer period with USACE subject matter experts.
12/06/22	Virtual Public Meeting	Information session held over Webex platform providing an overview of the WVS Draft EIS and public comment period. Included question and answer period with USACE subject matter experts.
12/08/22	Virtual Public Meeting	Information session held over Webex platform providing an overview of the WVS Draft EIS and public comment period. Included question and answer period with USACE subject matter experts.
January 2023	Flyers	Posted at various USACE project sites and provided as in-person meeting handouts.
1/06/23	Email notification via distribution list	Notice of Public Comment Period Extension.
1/09/23	Press Release	“Corps extends public comment period for proposed Willamette Valley System 30-year plan” https://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/Media/News-Releases/Article/3262661/corps-extends-public-comment-period-for-proposed-willamette-valley-system-30-ye/

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Date	Outreach Tool	Description
1/09/23	Public Open House in Springfield, Oregon	In-person information session providing an overview of the WVS Draft EIS and public comment period. Included question and answer period with USACE subject matter experts.
1/10/23	Public Open House in Eugene, Oregon	In-person information session providing an overview of the WVS Draft EIS and public comment period. Included question and answer period with USACE subject matter experts.
1/11/23	Public Open House in Sweet Home, Oregon	In-person information session providing an overview of the WVS Draft EIS and public comment period. Included question and answer period with USACE subject matter experts.
1/12/23	Public Open House in Stayton, Oregon	In-person information session providing an overview of the WVS Draft EIS and public comment period. Included question and answer period with USACE subject matter experts.
1/13/23	Notice of Availability – Comment period extension	Notice in the Federal Register that the Draft EIS Comment Period was extended from 01/19/2023 to 02/23/2023.
1/18/23	Email notification via distribution list	Notice that hard copies of the Draft EIS are available at eight local libraries.
3/16/23	Salem Creekside Rotary Club	In-person information session providing an overview of the WVS Draft EIS and public comment period. Included question and answer period with USACE subject matter experts.

END REVISED TEXT