



From the Desk of
Senator
Lew Frederick

THE RISK OF FLOODING ON THE LOWER COLUMBIA RIVER IS REAL REDUCE THE RISK: VOTE YES ON SENATE BILL 431

Levee Ready Columbia is a partnership of over 20 public, private, nonprofit, and community-based organizations convened by Oregon Solutions to maintain federal accreditation of the 27-mile levee system that runs along the lower Columbia River in Multnomah County. LRC is committed to preserving local access to affordable flood insurance by ensuring the levee system meets new federal safety standards; establishing sustainable governance and funding structures capable of supporting the system; and making the most of opportunities to improve the environmental and recreational value of the managed floodplain.

Project Partners:

- Audubon Society of Portland
- Bridgeton Neighborhood Assn.
- City of Fairview
- City of Gresham
- City of Portland
- City of Troutdale
- Columbia Corridor Assn.
- Col. Slough Watershed Council
- East Columbia Neigh. Assn.
- Fed. Emergency Mngmt. Agency
- Jubitz Corporation
- Metro
- Multnomah County
- Multnomah Co. Drainage District
- Peninsula Drainage District #1
- Peninsula Drainage District #2
- Port of Portland
- Sandy Drainage Improvement Co
- State of Oregon
- US Army Corps of Engineers

Contact:

Mark Landauer, lobbyist
mlandauer@sdao.org
503-896-2338

Since 1894, we've had four 100-year and two 500-year floods on the Columbia River in the Portland metro area including the 1948 Vanport flood that killed at least 15 people and left another 18k without homes and the 1964 Christmas Flood, which is regarded as one of Oregon's worst natural disasters to this day. There will be another major flood in this region. The only question is when and if we'll be ready.

A 27-mile levee system helps reduce the risk of flooding for a 13k acre area along the Columbia that is home to the Portland International Airport, Oregon's second largest source of drinking water, three interstate highways, 2,500 businesses that generate 59k jobs and more than \$16 billion in annual economic activity for the state, over 2,000 acres of parks and open spaces, and much more.

The levee system is managed by four separate drainage districts that operate under a century-old governance structure.

- **Federal accreditation:** The drainage districts have not been able to bring the levee system up to new federal standards and ensure the system remains federally accredited.
- **Benefits and burdens:** costs cannot be allocated across the many beneficiaries of the system
- **Fragmented responsibility:** Four separate boards manage one system. No single entity is responsible for managing risk.
- **Constrained budgets:** The drainage district can only cover basic operations and maintenance costs with very limited capital investment based on the most urgent need, which is a precarious way to manage flood risk.

Why Federal Accreditation Matters

For naturally flood-prone areas behind levees, FEMA will accredit the levees if certain standards are met. The benefits of accreditation include:

- access to lower cost flood insurance
- no flood insurance mandate for mortgage holders
- fewer development restrictions required

A modernized governance structure is needed to effectively manage the flood risk in this important region.

Multiple years of research, analysis, and discussion have gone into the development of SB 431, which establishes an Urban Flood & Water Quality District to manage flood safety along the Columbia River in Multnomah County. This structure is designed to:

- meet long-term flood safety needs;
- be able to adapt to new federal safety standards;
- allow for equitable distribution of costs based on services and benefits received;
- adjust to changing river conditions due to climate change; and
- contribute to improved water quality and habitat in the managed floodplain.

SB 431 requires that an initial Governor-appointed board establish a sustainable revenue structure for the district using assessments, utility fees, revenue bonds, and/or general obligation bonds with voter approval. Once the revenue structure is in place, the district can take over operations and absorb the four existing drainage districts and the board will begin to transition to a permanent structure of five elected members and four appointed members serving four-year terms.

The Urgency:

The US Army Corps of Engineers will complete a study of our local levee system in 2021, which will culminate with a request to fund up to 65% of their recommended improvements. **Having a modernized governance structure in place will allow us to leverage this opportunity and reduce the costs borne by Oregonians.**

Map of the Columbia Slough Watershed
Showing various planning areas and boundaries.

