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First of three phases to determine long-term management plan for Capitol Lake/Lower Deschutes Watershed complete

A work group of representatives from local, state and tribal governments is recommending a path forward on long-term planning for Capitol Lake/Lower Deschutes Watershed following a coordinated, year-long effort to gather community input and build the foundation for reaching long-term management goals.

The group, led by the state Department of Enterprise Services, has outlined the details of its recommendations in a [Phase 1 Report](#) to the Legislature. The report summarizes work on the first of three phases in an overall effort to determine a management plan for the 260-acre man-made reservoir. The reservoir is part of the Capitol Campus and a popular destination in Olympia, but it has environmental problems related to water quality, invasive species and sediment management.

The report also recommends proceeding with an environmental review of lake management options, called an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as Phase 2. If funded, Phase 2 could begin in late 2017 or early 2018.

Collaboration essential

Enterprise Services Director Chris Liu said: "I cannot emphasize enough how important the collaboration among local and tribal governments and state agencies – supported by participation from community groups and individuals – has been in reaching this milestone. Continuing to foster these long-term, collaborative relationships will be essential as we move into the next long-term planning phases for Capitol Lake/Lower Deschutes Watershed."

Liu said Enterprise Services looks forward to continuing the collaborative effort begun in Phase 1 with the Squaxin Island Tribe, the cities of Olympia and Tumwater, Thurston County, the Port of Olympia and the state departments of Natural Resources, Ecology and Fish and Wildlife, and noted that many members of the public as well as the Capitol Lake Improvement and Protection Association (CLIPA) and the Deschutes Estuary Restoration Team (DERT) brought extremely valuable information to the table during the Phase 1 process.

The Phase 1 report fulfills requirements in a 2015-17 [capital budget](#) proviso in which state lawmakers directed Enterprise Services to examine six key issues, which include identifying common, long-term planning goals for the future management of Capitol Lake and identifying management alternatives.

Purpose and need statement

According to a statement developed by the work group with community input, the purpose and need for the long-term planning effort is to identify an environmentally and economically sustainable management plan that:

- Improves water quality,
- Manages existing sediment accumulation and future deposition,
- Enhances impaired ecological functions within the existing Capitol Lake basin and adjacent watershed,
- Restores and enhances community use of the resource.

Phase 2

Under the State Environmental Policy Act, an EIS must be completed before a long-term management plan can be selected for implementation – including actions such as initial dredging to remove sediment that has

potential significant adverse environmental impacts of an agency action.

According to a joint letter of support to the Legislature from the Squaxin Island Tribe, the cities of Olympia and Tumwater, Thurston County and Port of Olympia: "We are writing jointly, as collaborative partners in the Capitol Lake/Lower Deschutes Watershed long-term management planning effort, to express support for funding the proposed Phase 2 to complete a project-specific Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)."

The state departments of Natural Resources, Ecology and Fish and Wildlife also sent letters of support for funding a project-specific EIS.

While not a decision document, the EIS will help identify a preferred alternative for decision makers to consider, once the technical analyses clearly point to one option. An early preferred alternative designation in no way restricts the lead agency's final decisions. Enterprise Services has volunteered to be the lead agency for the EIS.

During the Phase 2 EIS process, Enterprise Services would ask other agencies for technical assistance and participation on the scope and assessment for the technical analysis that will be undertaken as part of the EIS. Previous work, when applicable, can be incorporated into the EIS.

Moving forward

Since 1975, more than 200 studies and reports have been completed to address potential solutions and management approaches.

In his 2017-19 proposed budget, Gov. Jay Inslee included about \$4 million in funding for a project-specific EIS.

Gov. Jay Inslee said: "We have heard from the local community that the long-term management of Capitol Lake has been an issue for more than 30 years. Local problems need local solutions, and we need to move forward with a long-term management plan based on clear goals, a fair process, sound science, and recreational and economic opportunities. We are moving forward with the appropriate local partners, the right stakeholders and the community at the table. We all want what is best for this state treasure in our backyard."

Port of Olympia Commissioner Bill McGregor said: "I have been part of the Department of Enterprise Service's (DES) Capitol Lake/Deschutes Estuary Long Term Planning effort since its inception in 2015. As a Port of Olympia Commissioner who is deeply involved in the Thurston County community, I believe finding a resolution to this decades-old issue is imperative. The DES process has been the most promising effort to date to bring this issue to a sound conclusion. Phase 1 of the process has recently been completed. We are now looking ahead to Phase 2, where an Environmental Impact Statement will be conducted to evaluate the environmental impacts of several solutions being contemplated. I strongly support this effort continuing to progress and look forward, through the EIS process, to receiving robust public input on the scenarios developed to date. State investment in the Environmental Impact Statement process is paramount to ensuring a thoughtful resolution to this issue. I believe this community is ready for a decision."

More information

- [Long-term planning for Capitol Lake/Deschutes Watershed web page](#)
- Phase 1 report and related information is on the [Capitol Lake Reports web page](#)
- [Learn more about the State Environmental Policy Act \(SEPA\)](#)

SEPA process at a glance

Under state law, the EIS process will require Enterprise Services to:

- Identify a scope of study with the community and coordinating agencies.
- Conduct research and technical analyses. Previous work, when applicable, can be incorporated into the EIS.
- Issue a draft EIS with a community and agency engagement and comment process.
- Review comments and prepare a final EIS with written responses to the comments.