



Long-Term Planning for Capitol Lake/Lower Deschutes Watershed

Capitol Lake is a popular destination in Olympia, but it has environmental problems related to water quality, sediment management and invasive species. It is closed to active public use.

The 260-acre man-made reservoir located in Olympia and Tumwater, Washington, and the entire Deschutes River watershed, including Budd Inlet, have consistently failed to meet state and federal water quality standards.

For more than 30 years, the community and stakeholders have discussed potential long-term management options for the reservoir. Since 1975, more than 200 studies and reports have been completed to address potential solutions and management approaches.

In 2016, a work group of representatives from local, state and tribal governments completed the first of three phases in an overall plan to manage the reservoir and, collaboratively with the community, laid the foundation for a path forward.

Legal Requirement

An environmental review is required to move any long-term management approach forward. Under the State Environmental Policy Act, a project-specific Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be completed before a long-term management plan can be selected for implementation – including actions such as initial dredging.

Funding is required prior to beginning an EIS.

The Path Forward

The Department of Enterprise Services, 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 worked collaboratively with the community in 2016 during Phase 1 to build the foundation for reaching long-term management goals. Phase 1 was conducted in a manner similar to an expanded scoping process as preparation for an EIS.

On Dec. 30, 2016, the Department of Enterprise Services submitted a [Phase 1 Report](#) to the Legislature that:

- Summarizes Phase 1 work.
- Fulfills requirements in a 2015-17 [capital budget](#) proviso.
- Recommends proceeding with a project-specific EIS as Phase 2.

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Purpose and Need

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 1 Accomplishments

Key outcomes of the Phase 1 process include:

- Fostering long-term collaborative relationships essential for ensuring long-term Capitol Lake/Lower Deschutes Watershed management.
- Establishing the Purpose and Need Statement for long-term Capitol Lake/Lower Deschutes Watershed management.
- Laying the foundation to select and implement an environmentally and economically sustainable management approach in later project phases.
- Fulfilling requirements in a 2015-17 capital budget proviso in which the Legislature directed Enterprise Services to examine several key issues including identifying common, long-term planning goals for the future management of Capitol Lake and identifying management alternatives.

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Phase 2 - EIS

If funded, Phase 2 could begin in late 2017 or early 2018.

It would include scoping, completion of technical analyses, a draft EIS and a final EIS. Significant public involvement will continue in Phase 2.

Phase 3 - Implementation

Phase 3 will include final project decisions, permitting, final design and construction, and long-term maintenance.

Current Lake Management

Enterprise Services maintains the lake as part of the Capitol Campus under a long-term lease agreement with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). DNR manages state-owned aquatic lands on behalf of the people of the state per RCW 79.105. The current lease agreement expires in 2028.

