



The US Army Corps of Engineers to Conduct Study of Flood Protection Systems in Portland Region

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Portland, Ore. – The US Army Corps of Engineers have announced that they will conduct a flood damage reduction feasibility study of the Portland metropolitan levee system. The designation came through the Corps’ storm supplemental with funding for a \$3 million feasibility study over the next three years. The outcome of study will identify recommendations based on optimizing national economic development benefits balanced with other important considerations such as natural and cultural resources, socioeconomics, and life safety. The feasibility study builds on the work of the [Levee Ready Columbia](#) partnership, which was initiated through a Governor-designated Oregon Solutions project in 2013 to ensure the 27-mile levee system along the lower Columbia River continued to meet federal requirements and to help modernize the system, which reduces the risk of flooding for over 12,000 acres of land, 7,400 residents and 48,000 jobs.

Levee Ready Columbia’s efforts have included a comprehensive engineering evaluation of the levees, studies and inventories that have considered the environmental function of the system and the regional economic benefits generated behind the levees. This work has identified about seven areas where structural updates are needed on the levees. The Corps’ study will help to identify solutions to address these areas vulnerable to flood damage, as well as paths to implement those solutions. By working together to implement these solutions, the Corps, [Multnomah County Drainage District](#) on behalf of the four Columbia Corridor Drainage Districts, and the Levee Ready Columbia partnership will be able to reduce the overall flood risk that threatens people’s safety and key components of our regional economy. The results of the study will also be used to determine future federal investments in the system.

The request for the study was made by Levee Ready Columbia, the State of Oregon, and by members of Oregon’s congressional delegation. The delegation, including Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and Representatives Earl Blumenauer, Suzanne Bonamici, Peter DeFazio, and Kurt Schrader, submitted [a letter](#) strongly arguing the need for the project. “Since the Vanport Flood in 1948, the levee system has protected our communities, but recently the levees are showing significant signs of structural vulnerabilities,” explains Senator Jeff Merkley. “This study is an important next step in our efforts to modernize the levee system and protect the lives, jobs, and \$16 billion of economic activity behind the levees.”

In addition to the congressional delegation, Governor Kate Brown’s office has been an ongoing and vital supporter of the project through Oregon Solutions, the backing of Business Oregon, and the

Regional Solutions team. “This is a significant milestone for the project as we continue to work toward the long-term viability of the levee system and all it keeps safe,” said Governor Brown. “This study reinforces the importance of coordination, which will strengthen our ongoing efforts to modernize the Columbia River levee system.”

The Levee Ready Columbia partnership, convened by Jules Bailey, is also supported by the cities of Troutdale, Fairview, Gresham, and Portland, the Columbia Corridor drainage districts, Multnomah County, Metro, the Port of Portland, and numerous community groups. Metro Councilor Shirley Craddick has long championed Levee Ready Columbia: “This project continues to exemplify what can be accomplished through collaboration and strong coordination between local, regional, state, and federal agencies. Thanks to the hard work of all of the project partners, we’re well poised for success as we work with the Corps to develop plans to modernize the current levee system. There are 48,000 jobs protected by the levee system in Multnomah County, and is of great significance to the region’s economy.”

Speaking to the importance of the feasibility study for the region, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler noted that “The federal government has recognized the importance of assuring the levee system along the Columbia River is resilient and reliable, which will keep our citizens safe and our businesses thriving.” Troutdale Mayor Casey Ryan shared a similar sentiment stating, “The levee system protects our thriving local and regional economy. The land behind the levees in Troutdale provides family wage jobs that are vital for our community.”

While the system continues to be maintained and operated to the highest standards by [Multnomah County Drainage District](#), the study will work to achieve higher certainty and reliability of the system, which is crucial to the economic livelihood of Oregonians throughout the state. An economy that generates \$16 billion in annual economic activity can be found behind the levees. The Portland International Airport, Oregon Air National Guard and hundreds of businesses both small and large can be found behind the levees. Additionally, three interstate highways and two intercontinental railroads pass through the system.

“People rely on Portland International Airport and our marine facilities to stay connected with family and friends, and business and jobs,” said Curtis Robinhold, Port of Portland executive director. “As such, we’re very committed to the efforts to improve and modernize the levee system and welcome this study and continued partnership with the Corps.”

This designation is significant for the Portland metropolitan region, for the state of Oregon, and for the Pacific Northwest. The designation of the study by the Army Corps indicates that the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works’ office and the Office of Management and Budget recognize that our levee system needs specific updates to improve certainty and reliability in future flood events. The Levee Ready Columbia partnership remains committed to making those changes and modernizing the levee system, bolstered by the support and expertise of the Corps.

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