What is a Flood Control Zone District (FCZD)?

A Kittitas County Flood Control Zone District (FCZD) would be a special-purpose government fund authorized under RCW 86.15 to fund flood-reduction projects and programs in Kittitas County.

Why does Kittitas County want to form a Flood Control Zone District?

Floods and flood-related damage is common in Kittitas County, but there is no dedicated funding source for repairing damage when it occurs nor are there funds to implement projects to prevent or reduce damage during future floods. The county is forced to take money from other important projects to repair flood damaged roads and infrastructure. Because there is no funding for planning or construction of improvements to prevent damage, the county must return to the same sites repeatedly to make repairs.

Emergency response is compromised because vital transportation routes are at risk which can prevent access to citizens in need and it can put our emergency personnel in dangerous situations. There is no funding for planning or construction of improvements to better protect our citizens, emergency personnel, and infrastructure during major floods.

Floods cause millions of dollars of economic loss in Kittitas County because vital transportation infrastructure is frequently damaged. Kittitas County maintains 564 miles of roadway and 268 bridges and structures all of which are at risk of closure from flooding. In addition, Interstate 90 and Highways 97, 970, 10, and 821 are at risk of closure from flooding. Damaged infrastructure affects everything from grocery distribution, to the running of Central Washington University, to the exporting of timothy hay products, and the overall quality of life for Kittitas County residents.

Many of the flood protection facilities in Kittitas County were built in the early 1920’s or before and desperately need maintenance and repair. In addition, many of our levees do not meet federal standards for flood protection. More than $10 million in priority repairs are needed to upgrade flood levee and bank stabilization facilities countywide. Floods pose significant risk to public safety and health, regionally important economic centers, and transportation corridors. Kittitas County’s flood protection infrastructure must be strengthened to protect lives, homes, and businesses.
Who is in charge of a FCZD?

State law identifies the county commissioners as the governing Board of Supervisors of the district. The Board of Supervisors provides policy direction of the District activities and selects flood projects to be funded through a normal budget process. Through interlocal agreements, the Public Works Department could design and build the approved projects. State law identifies the County Engineer as the administrator of the district. In Kittitas County, the County Engineer reports to the Director of Public Works.

To maximize the number of projects and programs that can be completed with district revenue and to minimize administration costs, existing county staff will do as much of the work as possible.

Why now? Why not wait?

Data suggests that flood frequency and intensity is increasing. Storms hitting the region in the last five years have been severe. The 2009 and 2011 floods in Kittitas County caused millions of dollars in public and private property damage. Flooding also causes significant economic and personal loss by disrupting jobs, shopping, health care, schools, recreational activities and emergency response throughout the region. Based upon these recent experiences and the potential for increased flood frequency, a dedicated funding source is urgently needed to implement programs and projects to reduce flood risk.

How often has Kittitas County experienced flooding disasters?

Since 1975, Kittitas County has experienced a federally declared flood disaster eight times and the cost has exceeded $10,000,000. Additional local events that caused significant damage but were not federally declared flood disasters occurred in 1998, 2006, and May 2011. Future floods are expected to exceed the protective abilities of our existing flood facilities.

Where are the floodplains located in Kittitas County?

Kittitas County has significant major floodplains along the Yakima, Cle Elum, and Teanaway rivers, as well as along Manastash, Naneum, Taneum, Big, Little, Dry and Reecer Creeks. There are other minor regulated floodplains located throughout the county. The floodplains range from urban type settings around the Cities of Ellensburg and Cle Elum to the rural areas along the Teanaway and smaller streams. Many of the levees along these rivers and streams were built more than 80 years ago without regard to future development conditions. Now, these aging levees protect major population and business centers, residences, and critical public facilities such as roads, bridges, and utility treatment plants.
How does flooding affect me?

It has been estimated that a major flood in Kittitas County could generate flood-related losses in excess of $200 million. In an effort to improve flooding response and recovery, Kittitas County has taken the lead in identifying options and alternatives to address regional flooding risks.

All citizens within the boundaries share the cost burdens associated with flood response and recovery, even those that live on high ground. For example, many planned projects have been postponed or cancelled in order to pay the county costs associated with flooding.

What projects and programs will the FCZD fund?

If formed, the FCZD must adopt by resolution a budget indicating flood control or storm water control improvements and maintenance activities that it will fund. Identified capital improvement projects must be part of a comprehensive plan for flood control for that stream or watercourse. Kittitas County already has a Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan that has been approved by the Department of Ecology. The FCZD can adopt this plan and use it to begin to implement projects and maintenance activities. The FCZD will work to develop an updated comprehensive plan that will provide a more thorough list of flood reduction programs and projects that can be implemented in the future.

What are typical FCZD projects?

The projects range in scope from upgrading and maintaining existing levees, to developing flood reduction plans for specific floodplain reaches, to constructing new flood reduction structures and facilities. Projects can also include non-structural solutions such as buying flood-prone properties or drafting model land use regulations that keep people and structures out of high flood hazard danger areas.

Specific projects and efforts might include:

- Major flood hazard reduction projects that provide significant regional benefits
- Local flood hazard reduction projects that provide relief for a specific problem
- Regional flood warning systems and emergency response plans
- Public outreach and education
- Flood hazard mapping and technical studies
- Mechanisms for citizen inquiry and public response
How would the FCZD develop and implement programs and projects?

The Board of County Commissioners would function as the primary governing body for the District but will be assisted by several key committees and project partners. An advisory committee could be set up to determine which projects get funded. One of the first decisions will be to determine the make-up of this advisory committee, for it will be important to involve local jurisdictions, the Yakama Tribe, and key stakeholders as advisors to the district’s program and future capital projects. The FCZD may also choose to leverage its funds by partnering with a wide range of external entities – from state and federal agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to local governments, watershed groups and tribal governments.

While the District would be an independent county fund, the Board of County Commissioners and Public Works Department are committed to establishing an efficient, project-oriented organization. Existing organizations and resources will be used wherever possible. The FCZD will not duplicate existing government services. To maximize the number of programs and projects that can be implemented with the available funds, the Public Works Department would carry out many of the approved flood protection projects and programs under contract with the FCZD.

How would FCZD projects and programs be funded?

State law authorizes a District to collect a property tax or a parcel fee. The same State Law requires that any funds collected by the district only be spent on specific planned flood-related activities and actions. It cannot be used for any other government purpose.

The proposal under consideration includes a flat fee assessment of $16.11 per parcel which is expected to raise approximately $500,000 annually for the FCZD. This amount was calculated to meet the documented annual flood losses and provide for the necessary cash reserves to fund floodplain management operations in Kittitas County.

Because major floods affect the entire region, the proposed flood control zone district includes the entire county – both unincorporated areas and the cities within the county. The Board of Supervisors could vote annually on a revenue proposal for flood risk reduction projects and programs. They have the authority to eliminate or adjust the amount of the fees as circumstances change.

If there is a fee, why isn’t it charged only to people who live in floodplains?

Although people who have homes or businesses in the floodplain are at more immediate risk, flooding affects the entire regional economy and the cost of emergency
response and repair of flood-damaged infrastructure is borne by all county residents. Approximately 18% of Kittitas County residents live in the floodplain area of our rivers and streams, and another 10% work within it. On average, 50,000 vehicles a day travel transportation corridors that are at risk of flooding in Kittitas County. Water and Wastewater treatment for over 5,000 residents occurs in the affected floodplains.

Further, the most recent flooding caused damage well outside the normal boundaries of the regulated floodplains and in areas not normally impacted by flooding. Areas of inundation and erosion occurred well outside what is considered normal for Kittitas County.

**What happens if we don’t create a FCZD?**

Without a FCZD, the flooding and the resulting funding problems we currently experience associated with emergency response and recovery will continue without relief. Additionally, no funding exists to adequately address repetitive loss areas through mitigation programs. Current predictions are that flooding will become more frequent and more severe over the next decades.

**When will these decisions be made?**

Kittitas County is reaching out to local jurisdictions, communities and neighborhoods in early 2012 to discuss the possible District formation and respond to questions and concerns. Kittitas County is also conducting a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review of taking this action.

Tentative plans are to introduce a Flood Control Zone District Formation ordinance in June of 2012, including a public hearing process. The Board of County Commissioners will then have the opportunity to review the proposal. Once all reviews have been completed, the County Commissioners can formally act to form the District and the District could begin planning functions as expected.

**More information:**

Visit the website at [www.co.kittitas.wa.us/publicworks/flood/](http://www.co.kittitas.wa.us/publicworks/flood/) or contact Kirk Holmes, Director of Public Works or Christina Wollman, County Floodplain Manager at (509) 962-7523.