



Legislation Text

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A MOTION requesting the governor of the state of Washington to authorize the director of the Washington state Emergency Management Division to assume the overall coordination of local emergency response efforts, in the event of catastrophic flooding in the Green River valley.

WHEREAS, prior to the construction of the Howard Hanson Dam in 1961, the floodwaters of the Green river would spread out almost unimpeded across the Green River valley, and

WHEREAS, because major flooding has been reduced, the valley is now home to tens of thousands of residents, major employers such as Boeing and Starbucks, and the region's largest warehouse and distribution operations, and

WHEREAS, an independent study titled Economic Connections Between the King County Floodplains and the Greater King County Economy prepared by ECONorthwest, Inc. states that roughly six percent, or sixty-five thousand, of the county's jobs are located within the floodplains, with an annual wage and salary income of three billion seven hundred million dollars and that property in King County's floodplains is valued at more than seven billion dollars, and

WHEREAS, after the January 2009 floods, the United States Army Corps of Engineers ("the Corps") discovered depressions in the embankment adjacent to the dam and temporarily restricted its water-holding capacity, and

WHEREAS, recent monitoring and tests have shown several "anomalies" suggesting a level of seepage and internal erosion through the abutment that had not been anticipated by the Corps, resulting in immediate steps

to lower water levels behind the dam even more, and

WHEREAS, while the Corps is undertaking immediate steps, which were a grout "curtain" in the embankment, to reduce the level of risk, it has acknowledge that a permanent solution would be several years away and could cost upwards to several hundred million dollars, and

WHEREAS, a flood event that would inundate the Green River valley could be of a magnitude that causes widespread and severe flooding in the adjacent Cedar and White River watersheds, and

WHEREAS, while the dam presents no immediate danger, it is possible that release of higher-than standard flows could result in levees in the lower valley being overtopped should a major storm event occur with the temporary restriction of pool elevation, and

WHEREAS, the resulting shutdown of economic activity due to flooding in the Green River valley would cost the region forty-six million dollars or more every day by curtailing everything from aircraft manufacturing to bustling warehouse distribution centers, and

WHEREAS, in recognition of what could be the first massive flooding of the Green River valley since the 1950s, the cities of Auburn, Kent, Renton and Tukwila already have been pursuing efforts to reduce the level of flooding and have embarked with King County and the King County Flood Control District on an effort to coordinate their individual emergency response planning, and

WHEREAS, while the coordination of the individual emergency response plans is a necessary effort, the actual implementation of emergency response plans would still be undertaken by each individual jurisdiction and a failure of one jurisdiction to adequately implement their individual plan could undo the efforts of the other jurisdictions, and

WHEREAS, a recent evaluation of the emergency response efforts during Hurricane Katrina, which was Congressional Reports: S. Rpt. 109-322 - Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared, underscored the need to a have a clear line of authority and cited several instances where the sharing of manpower or equipment resources could have reduced the impacts of flooding on residents, such as individual jurisdictions or agencies

within the same jurisdictions refused to share their resources even if they had no immediate need for them, and

WHEREAS, in the case of recent floods in Fargo, North Dakota, a single line of authority allowed an efficient use of manpower and equipment resources, regardless of jurisdiction, resulting in much less damage to property, and

WHEREAS, the disparate flooding experiences of New Orleans and Fargo underscores the need to have implementation of the individual emergency plans undertaken by a clearly defined and single line of authority, and

WHEREAS, the Washington National Guard is a valuable resource in implementing emergency response plans, its deployment must be authorized by the governor and could be significantly delayed;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

Until such a time as the permanent solution to the seepage on the embankment adjacent to the Howard Hansen dam has been fully implemented, the governor is requested to authorize the director of the Washington state Emergency Management Division, in the event of likely flooding due the water releases at the Howard Hansen dam, to:

- A. Assume overall responsibility for the coordinated implementation of the individual emergency response plans of the jurisdictions in the Green River valley;
- B. Allocate the manpower and equipment resources of each jurisdiction in a manner that best ensure the maximum protection of lives and property; and
- C. Initiate the mobilization of the resources of the Washington National Guard to assist in emergency response efforts.