



Your property is in or near a flood prone area.

# Flooding in Whatcom County

## What to do Before, During, and After a Flood

Flooding typically occurs between October-February. Keep this newsletter handy!

El boletín está disponible en español: [whatcomcounty.us/inundaciones](http://whatcomcounty.us/inundaciones)

### 2024 Newsletter Content

**1** Contacts & History

**2** Prepare

**3** Stay Safe

**4** Recover & Projects/Planning

## 1 CONTACTS

Flood event emergency alerts and evacuation notices are overseen by the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) Division of Emergency Management. This information may be sent via email, text, or cell phone and posted on the [whatcomready.org](http://whatcomready.org) website and [facebook.com/whatcomready](https://facebook.com/whatcomready). The Emergency Alert System may also be used to communicate life safety messages. Local law enforcement and fire service agencies may do door-to-door visits or use public address systems.

**BEFORE** **Sign-up for Emergency Alerts and Notifications** at [whatcomready.org](http://whatcomready.org)

**Sign-up for the Emergency Management Daily Briefing** at [whatcomcounty.us/EMDB](http://whatcomcounty.us/EMDB)

**View Current Information** at [facebook.com/whatcomready](https://facebook.com/whatcomready)

**View Flood Forecasts & River Conditions** at [whatcomcounty.us/floodforecast](http://whatcomcounty.us/floodforecast)

**DURING** **Call the WCSO Division of Emergency Management Call Center** at **360-788-5303** during floods and other emergencies for information.

### Listen in to Radio Stations

#### Local

- KGMI - AM 790
- KBAI - AM 930
- KPUG - AM 1170
- KISM - FM 92.9
- KAFE - FM 104.1

#### Other

- NOAA Weather Radio
- 162.425 MHz (Puget Sound)
- 162.525 MHz (Blaine)
- Weather Radio Canada
- 162.55 MHz

**Request Information on Sandbag Supplies** during declared emergencies at **360-778-6400**. Bags and sand will be available for self-service assembly.

**AFTER** **Call the WCSO Division of Emergency Management** at **360-788-5303** for assistance to recover from flood damages or visit [whatcomready.org](http://whatcomready.org)

## HISTORY

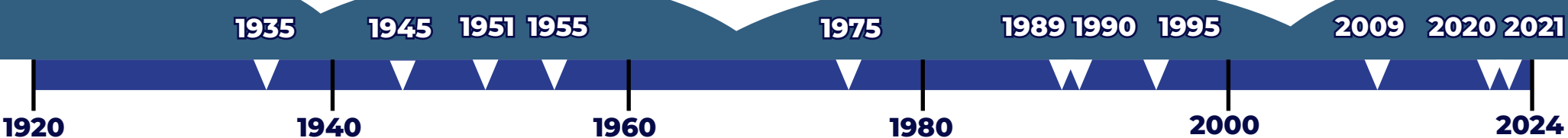


The Nooksack River and its tributaries impact the largest area of the county, including the overflow corridor between Everson and Sumas. The Sumas River, Samish River, numerous alluvial fan areas, lakes, and coastal areas of Whatcom County are also susceptible to flooding.

The floodplain – the lowland adjacent to a river or stream that is susceptible to flooding – is essentially nature's "safety valve" for managing floods. One of its crucial functions is to store and slow down excess water. When a river has access to its floodplain, floodwaters from rain or snowmelt spread over a wider area, reducing and slowing the amount of water heading downstream. When the size of a floodplain is reduced by levees or a floodplain is altered by impervious surfaces, the speed, depth, and peak flows of floodwaters increase, causing greater damage.

Floodplains are shaped by a river's movement. In the Nooksack basin, the floodplain contains old river channels and side channels that are critical for fish and wildlife. Old river channels also dissipate the force and energy of floodwaters and provide storage for high flows and sediment. Increasing the Nooksack River's access to its floodplain is an important management tool that reduces peak flows and flood risk.

Whatcom County has had **11** significant floods in the past **100** years:



## What to Do Before a Flood

### Protect Your Property

Plan ahead and take steps to protect your property and limit your losses before flood season:

- Elevate your house or commercial building above the 100-year flood elevation (commercial buildings may also be made dry floodproofed or watertight).
- Wet floodproof non-residential structures.
- Prepare in advance to use sandbags, plywood, and plastic to protect your property during a flood.
- When possible, move property and livestock to higher ground before a flood.
- Register your farm at your local Farm Service Agency office. Being registered ahead of time will help to expedite the process to obtain recovery funds after an event.

### Obtain Flood Insurance

You don't need to live in a floodplain to purchase flood insurance. In fact, because Whatcom County participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), any property owner is eligible for flood insurance. About 50% of all flood damages nationwide occur outside of the mapped 100-year floodplain area. Note that flood damage is not covered under standard homeowner's insurance policies, and lenders require flood insurance for most floodplain home loans. There is a 30-day waiting period, so contact an insurance agent about getting flood insurance well before flood season.

### Protect Natural Floodplain Functions

It is important to inspect drainage systems on your property frequently for damage and remove debris that may clog or reduce drainage capacity before flood water arrives. A plugged channel cannot dissipate floodwaters or allow for fish passage, which is a vital natural resource. Keeping driveway culverts clear is the responsibility of private property owners.

**Report County Road Drainage Problems** at [whatcomcounty.us/contactpublicworks](http://whatcomcounty.us/contactpublicworks) or call **Maintenance and Operations** at **360-778-6400**.

### Follow Building Requirements

Before you build, remodel, repair, fill or re-grade your property, check with the county or city government in which you live as to what permits and conditions will be required. It is always wise to check into requirements before you commit to any plans, construction, or materials. If your proposed repair or improvement is valued at 50% or greater of the value of the existing structure, then your repair or improvement is considered "substantial" and will be required to meet the elevation and floodproofing requirements for new construction.

### Create a Two Weeks Ready Kit

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>WATER</b>	1 gallon of water per person per day. Replace DIY stored water every 6 months.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>FOOD</b>	Sufficient non-perishable food. If you pack canned foods, remember a can opener.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>MEDICATIONS</b>	Prescription and non-prescription medications. If you wear glasses, include a spare pair.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>FIRST AID KIT</b>	Remember to get enough supplies for the number of people who may be using them.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>HYGIENE ITEMS</b>	Set aside extra items so they are ready.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>CLOTHING</b>	Pack extra clothing, shoes, and blankets.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>RADIO</b>	A battery or crank-operated portable radio and extra batteries.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>FLASHLIGHT</b>	Bring extra batteries, too.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>SPECIAL ITEMS</b>	Such as baby needs or contact lens supplies, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>COMFORT ITEMS</b>	Books, games, personal electronics, etc.

## What to Do During a Flood

### Flood Notices

When there is a possibility of a flood, the **National Weather Service** issues multiple flood notices, including advisories, watches, and warnings, at [weather.gov/sew](http://weather.gov/sew)

Click on **Rivers and Lakes** for current river conditions and forecasts.

The National Weather Service may use these terms in their notices:

**River Forecast Point**- A river gauge site that represents a specific reach of the river and has a flood stage established by local emergency management officials and the National Weather Service.

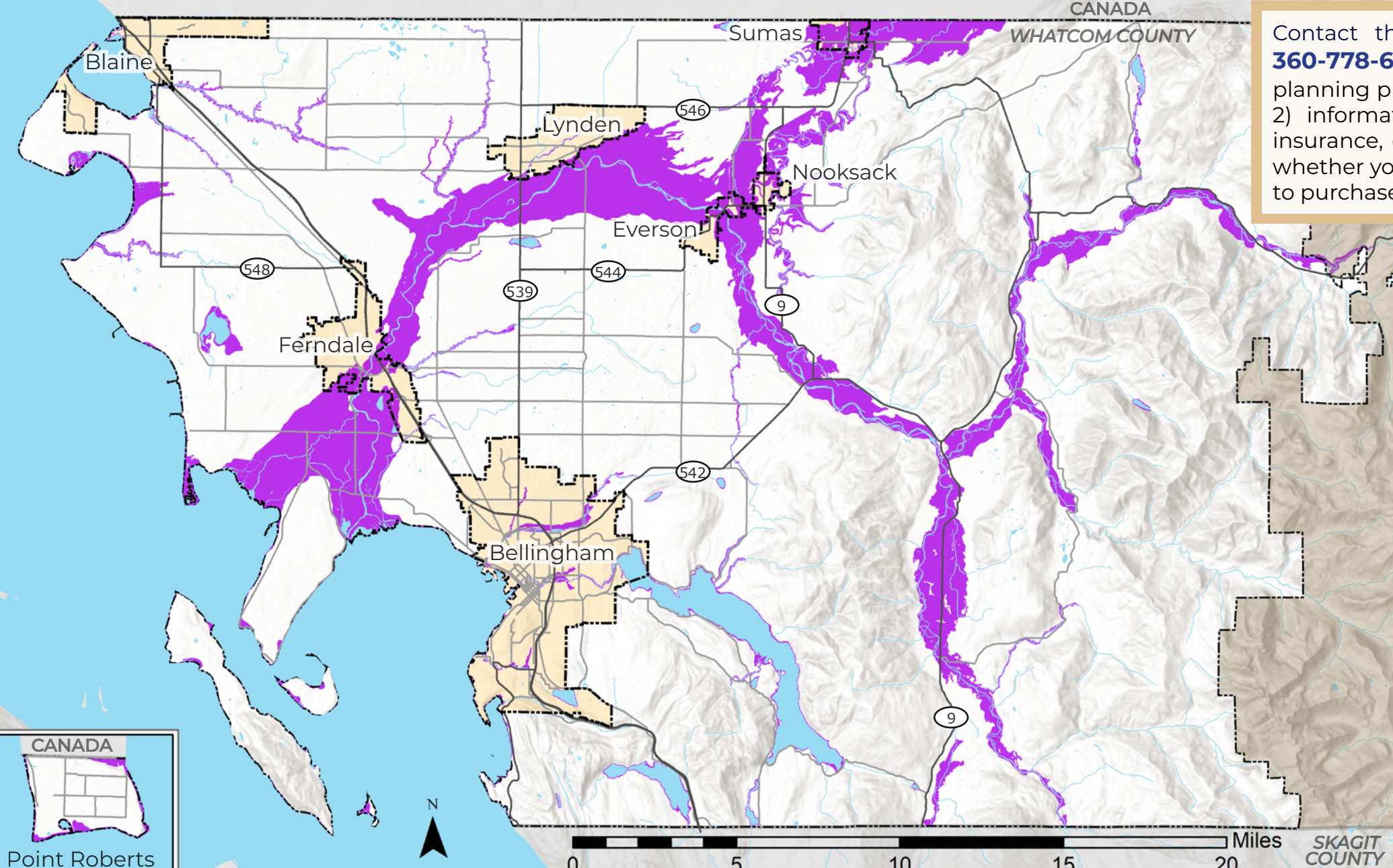
**Flood Stage**- The water level height in feet at a river forecast point where flood waters begin to potentially damage buildings, roadways and bridges.

### Evacuation Levels

The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office **Division of Emergency Management** uses three levels of evacuation.

EVACUATION LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	ACTION TO TAKE
<b>LEVEL 1 READY</b> <i>Possible evacuation in your area</i>	Be aware of the danger in your area and start preparing to evacuate.	<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor local media and check on neighbors <input type="checkbox"/> Update your two weeks emergency kit <input type="checkbox"/> Review your emergency evacuation and sheltering plans <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare both the inside and outside of your home <input type="checkbox"/> Leave if you feel unsafe
<b>LEVEL 2 SET</b> <i>Short notice evacuation likely in your area</i>	Be prepared for sudden evacuation - leave now if you need extra time.	<input type="checkbox"/> Complete your evacuation checklist <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that your two weeks emergency kit is ready to grab and go <input type="checkbox"/> Continue to monitor local media <input type="checkbox"/> Leave if you feel unsafe
<b>LEVEL 3 GO!</b> <i>Evacuate immediately from your area</i>	Leave now! Danger in your area.	<input type="checkbox"/> Follow directions from law enforcement or fire departments <input type="checkbox"/> Do not return home until officials have determined it is safe

### Know Your Flood Hazard: Contact River & Flood Division to Find Out the Flood Hazard for Your Property



Contact the **River & Flood Division** at **360-778-6230** for 1) help selecting and planning property protection measures and 2) information on historic flooding, flood insurance, or flood preparedness, including whether your property or one you may want to purchase is in a floodplain.

**LEGEND**

- FEMA 100-Year Floodplain
- Water
- City
- National Forest

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Visit [whatcomcounty.us/2979](http://whatcomcounty.us/2979) and click the **Natural Hazards Explorer** to view an interactive map with flood and other natural hazard data.

*Note: This data is being updated and areas outside of displayed layer may still be prone to flooding.*

### Emergency Information

For information during a declared emergency, contact the **Division of Emergency Management Call Center** at **360-788-5303** or visit [whatcomready.org](http://whatcomready.org) for emergency information, including shelter locations.

### What to Do Before You Leave

- Shut off all electrical circuits at the electrical panel or disconnect switches. If you can't, turn off or disconnect all electrical appliances.
- Move all appliances several feet off the ground or to the second floor, if possible.
- Shut off the main water and gas valves.
- Pack your two week emergency kit.
- Make arrangement for pets, including plans for sheltering and bringing a crate, leash, food, and medications.
- Ensure livestock have enough food and water and move to high ground if able.

### Flood Safety

Flooding can be extremely dangerous and unpredictable. Long periods of rain may cause slowly rising floodwaters over several hours or days, but a dam or levee failure could cause a rapid and dramatic rise in floodwaters.

- To decrease the potential for injury due to flooding:
- Know the flood warning procedures.
  - Move to a safe area before access is cut off.
  - Don't drive where water is over the road; the road may be washed out.
  - If your vehicle stalls in a flooded area, abandon it if it is safe and seek higher ground.
  - If you are caught in the house by rising waters, move to the second floor or the roof.
  - Keep children away from floodwaters, ditches, culverts, and storm drains.

# 4 RECOVER

## What to Do After a Flood

### Return Safely

- Return home only when local officials say it is safe to.
- Before entering, check for structural damage that could cause collapse. Turn off any outside gas lines at the meter, or tank, and let the house air for several minutes.
- Do not strike a match when entering your home. There may have been a gas leak.
- Be careful about turning the power on again. Watch for electrical shorts or live wires. Do not use water-damaged appliances.
- Dry your house slowly. Carpets and drywall may have to be removed. Water can be trapped between walls and will not dry.
- If your home or business has suffered extensive structural damage, this may be the time to elevate or floodproof.

### Food and Drinking Water Safety

- Do not use food or water that has been exposed to floodwaters, it may be contaminated.
- Until the public water system or your private well has been declared safe, boil water for drinking and cooking vigorously for 10 minutes.

### Report Damages

- Document your flood losses and contact your insurance agent for flood loss claims.
- If you need assistance to recover from flood damages, call the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office **Division of Emergency Management** at **360-788-5303**.

### Livestock and Crop Assistance

- Report damage to farms, crops, or livestock to the **Everson Farm Service Agency Office** by contacting **360-318-8121**.
- Remove wet hay from barns as soon as possible to prevent spontaneous hay combustion.
- Assess your animals, fence lines, and building structures. Return animals only after the threat has passed and the safety of buildings or the area has been assessed.
- Keep animals away from flood waters which may contain harmful bacteria or chemicals.
- Monitor animals daily for signs of illness.
- Contact the **Whatcom Conservation District** as a resource for landowners at **360-526-2381**.

# PROJECTS & PLANNING

## Flood Hazard Reduction Projects

Long-term risk reduction projects developed through comprehensive planning.

### Cougar Creek-Neevel Levee Improvement

**Purpose:** Improve levee integrity, fish passage & habitat, and agricultural drainage.

**Status:** 100% Design, construction anticipated in 2025

### Ferndale Levee Improvement

**Purpose:** Provide reliable flood protection. Improve fish habitat, stormwater treatment, and recreation.

**Status:** 60% Design

### Glacier-Gallup Alluvial Fan Restoration

**Purpose:** Improve public safety. Reduce highway bridge & levee maintenance. Restore fish habitat and water & sediment flow.

**Status:** Public input

### Abbott Levee Protection

**Purpose:** Improve levee and set back.


**Status:** Construction TBD

Project Updates at [whatcomcounty.us/flood](http://whatcomcounty.us/flood)

## Hazard Mitigation Assistance

In 2022, Whatcom County worked with the cities of Everson, Ferndale, and Sumas to identify properties with a high risk of repeated flooding. Over 800 property owners were invited to respond with interest to participate in a voluntary property buyout or home elevation. The Federal Emergency Management Agency awarded funding this year, with which Whatcom County has acquired 12 properties and will complete demolitions and site restoration in 2024-2025.

### Funding Awarded For:

	<b>\$9.4M for 12 acquisitions</b> to be completed in 2024-2025		<b>\$2.4M for 12 elevations</b> to commence in 2025
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## Flood Damage Repair Projects

Repairs completed on existing flood control structures that were damaged during floods.

### Completed:

- Everson Overflow Bank Stabilization
- Marine Drive Levee Repair
- Truck Road Bank Stabilization (pictured above)
- Hudson Road Bridge Temporary Repair
- Timon Levee Repair
- Upper Hampton Levee Repair

### In Progress:

- Hudson Road Bridge Replacement Alternatives Analysis
- Acme Woody Revetment Repair
- Bertrand Creek Levee Stabilization

## Transboundary Flood Initiative

In October 2023, representatives from the State of Washington, the Province of British Columbia, local Tribes and First Nations, Whatcom County, and the City of Abbotsford signed the Nooksack and Sumas Transboundary Flood Initiative (TFI) Collaborative Framework. This established the TFI to better address repeated flooding events in the Nooksack and Sumas watersheds and the shared reliance on transboundary ecosystems and resources. The initiative aims to identify and pursue flood risk reduction and ecosystem restoration through: 1) research and planning 2) project review, coordination, and capital project support 3) pursuit of funding and 4) communication.

More information at [ecology.wa.gov/tfi](http://ecology.wa.gov/tfi)

## Nooksack Floodplain Integrated Planning

The Floodplain Integrated Planning (FLIP) process aims to develop long-lasting solutions that reduce flood risks to cities, farms, and critical public infrastructure, while also improving fish habitat.

Visit [whatcomcounty.us/FLIP](http://whatcomcounty.us/FLIP) and click **FLIP Story Map** to view interactive maps and a narrative of the FLIP process, landscape, and history.

