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For Immediate Release

Groups Move to Protect People, Property and Wildlife in Flood-Prone Areas

Preliminary injunction motion filed to temporarily halt new federal flood insurance policies in Puget Sound until people, property and endangered species are protected

Seattle, WA (December 21, 2011) – Today, the National Wildlife Federation asked a judge to prevent the U.S. government from issuing federally-backed flood insurance policies for new development in risky flood-prone areas around Puget Sound.

The motion for a preliminary injunction, filed in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington, alleges the Federal Emergency Management Agency, (FEMA) failed to ensure that new floodplain management standards protect endangered species like salmon and orcas.

If the motion is granted, the federal government will be prevented from issuing insurance for new development in flood-prone areas until FEMA implements revised floodplain protection standards and complies with the Endangered Species Act.

“People, communities, and salmon are all put at risk by harmful development in floodplains,” said Dan Siemann, senior environmental policy specialist for the National Wildlife Federation in Seattle. “FEMA was given three years to fix its flood insurance program so that it stops harming these sensitive habitats, but even after the deadline it continues to support destruction of critical salmon areas.”

FEMA is a major underwriter of flood policies in the U.S. According to FEMA’s records, there are 42,000 flood insurance policies in force in Puget Sound, many of them for new development projects built after 2000. The previous year, the federal government listed Chinook salmon in Puget Sound as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, in large part because of the ongoing destruction of their habitat in streams and rivers.

“We have always known that building new homes and businesses in the floodplain is dangerous for people and economically senseless for the taxpayers that have to bail them out,” said Jan Hasselman, the Earthjustice attorney handling the motion. “Now we know that it’s also helping push salmon and orcas to the brink of extinction. FEMA needs to take a ‘time out’ on promoting new development until they can make needed changes to this outdated program.”

In 2008, federal experts with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) told FEMA that its flood insurance program actually encourages construction within sensitive

Puget Sound floodplains. Because most private insurers refuse to issue policies to floodplain homes, FEMA's insurance program allows development to occur where it otherwise would not. The agency called for changing how the federal flood-insurance program is implemented in the region. However, three years after those important findings, FEMA has made few if any changes, and floodplain development continues unabated.

Since 1990, there were 16 federally declared flood disasters in the Puget Sound region—more than one every other year. Those floods have caused at least 58 deaths and cost taxpayers more than \$1.4 billion in repairs statewide. Interstate 5 has been closed four times due to flooding, halting transportation and commerce and disrupting communities. More than 800 homes have been flooded multiple times.

A hearing on the motion could be scheduled as early as February, 2012. The case will be heard by Judge Ricardo Martinez in Seattle. NWF is represented by attorneys Jan Hasselman and Todd True of the non-profit law firm Earthjustice.

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The [National Wildlife Federation](#) is America's largest conservation organization inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.

[Earthjustice](#) is a non-profit environmental law firm dedicated to protecting the magnificent places, natural resources, and wildlife of this earth, and to defending the right of all people to a healthy environment. We bring about far-reaching change by enforcing and strengthening environmental laws on behalf of hundreds of organizations and communities.