



# FEMA

## Snohomish County Chatham Acres Acquisition

**Chatham Acres, WA** - A flood in December 1999 caused major damage to Chatham Acres, a small community located on the North Fork Stillaguamish River. In a process known as avulsion, the river abandoned its existing path and cut an entirely new 200-foot wide, 800-foot long channel through Chatham Acres before rejoining its original course.

As the river's path changed its course, one home was washed away. Fortunately the house was unoccupied at the time and no one was hurt. Ten other residences in the area, however, were immediately threatened by the avulsion. Something needed to be done to prevent additional damages or destruction of the homes by flooding or further migration of the river.

Most of the homes in Chatham Acres had been constructed in the 1930s, before the implementation of Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs). Unknowingly, the homes were built within the Stillaguamish River's floodway.

In response to the immediate problem, the Chatham Acres Homeowner's Association (CAHA) applied for and received approval to construct a section of rip-rap along the affected shore.

It became clear early in the project that the rip-rap would suffice only as a temporary solution. Soon after it was in place, three more flood events caused the loss of an additional 50 feet of riverbank. The river had also begun to erode the shoreline behind the rip-rap.

In addition to the ongoing erosion at the site of the 1999 event, an even larger threat was developing 650 feet upstream from the rip-rap location. The Stillaguamish River appeared to be changing course and would likely enter Placid Creek, a parallel stream to the Stillaguamish, which would lead to even greater and more damaging avulsion throughout the area.

In June 2002, an application was filed for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) requesting funding for the purchase and demolition of the Chatham Acres homes. The proposed removal of the residences and restoration of the area to its natural state offered life sustaining, ecological, and financial benefits.

The most important advantage to the acquisition approach was safeguarding the lives and property of those in the endangered area. With the residences gone, not only would the immediate threat be resolved, but any potential problems arising from future flooding and avulsion would be removed as well.

The County agreed as part of accepting the grant to never develop anything on the property and put restrictive easements on the property title to ensure this. Another major reason the acquisition strategy was selected was due to its favorable effect on the area's ecology.

During the course of the project, some positive developments occurred. While assessing the properties for the demolitions, the contractor determined that much of the house material could be recycled for future use. When calculating the value of the reclaimed material, in comparison with the originally quoted figure the demolitions would cost, a significant savings resulted. Additionally, two of the homes designated as historic were saved and relocated prior to the scheduled destruction.



Snohomish County,  
Washington



### Quick Facts

Sector:

**Public**

Cost:

**\$1,899,000.00 (Actual)**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Acquisition/Buyouts**

Primary Funding:

**Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**

