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Skagit Valley Herald

Skagit River Flood Control County Asks for More Than Offered

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Staff Reporter

MOUNT VERNON – Skagit County officials asked for more flood control measures than the Army Corp of Engineers has tentatively agreed to give them, during a public hearing held by Corp officials here last night.

A current project bearing the funding stamp of approval by Congress calls for \$15.6 million of improvements to Skagit River levees, from the mouth to the Burlington Northern railroad crossing, at the north boundary of Mount Vernon. The proposed levees would give an 11-year flood protection, meaning the city and rural areas could expect protection for a flood expected to occur every 11 years.

However, the project requested by county officials – termed “Alternative No. 3” by the Corp – calls for the same improvements as described previously, but also asks for protection from the larger 100 year floods in the Mount Vernon and Burlington areas. The estimated cost of the project is \$27 to \$53 million with a projected local share cost of \$3 to \$7 million.

Audience members also asked levee improvements be extended to Sedro-Woolley, also located close to the Skagit River. This would cost an additional \$12.5 million.

The Corp will be taking the comments under consideration, studying closer the costs and feasibility of the suggestions and then will make a funding recommendation to Congress.

Flooding has long been a problem for Skagit Valley. A previous flood in December, 1975 caused \$3,247,000 damages, but that flood is dwarfed by huge floods which occurred in the 19th century.

In his support for Alternative No. 3, county commission chairman Howard Miller said flooding has caused severe damage in the past, and would greatly damage the farm industry. He said he wanted Alternatives 4, 5 and 6 to be maintained as future alternatives. These proposals call for the previously mentioned levees, plus construction of a Avon bypass and upstream storage of floodwater. Burlington City Supervisor Arnold Hansen said the city wants Alternative No. 3. Lack of reasonable flood protection would be “gross negligence”, he said.

Harold Christenson, representing Mount Vernon, said Mount Vernon wanted the 100 year flood protection, and therefore wanted Alternative No. 3.

County Engineer Lloyd Johnson noted, “People have had so many studies they are beginning to wonder when

something will happen.” He supported the same alternatives.

Referring to a previous analogy, Bob Hulbert of the Skagit Valley Conservation District said that for 40 years, we have rolled the dice very well.” He also urged 100 year corp protection from the Corp.

“In a hundred year flood, people would die,” he said.

Contrary to indications from the Corp, 100 year flood protection would not hurt the environment, Hulbert stated.

Some of the 135-member crowd dissented with the county officials. One man suggested bulldozing the dikes that are there now, to let “the water ooze where nature intended it.” Almost all the crowd, however, asked for flood control of some type.

A number of upper Skagit River residents asked that flood control be extended up that direction, to Sedro-Woolley and beyond.

Larry Kunzler of Mount Vernon asked if diking in the urban areas would cause the water to back up and flood the farm areas. He was told by a Corp engineer that it might.

According to Corp chief planner Dwain Hogan, if the Corp recommends Alternative No. 3 as feasible, then it could probably get the funding. Costs of the project are estimated at \$27 million with the additional levees extending to Sedro-Woolley costing an additional 12.5 million.

The cost of levee and channel improvements, 100 year protection with urban levees and upstream storage (a storage reservoir or dam at the lower Sauk River) is estimated at \$175 million to \$225 million.

The cost of urban levees and channel improvements, plus the creation of the Avon bypass which would divert floodwaters to Padilla Bay would be \$70 million to \$90

million. The cost of upstream storage, the Avon bypass and all levee improvements is estimated at \$200 million to \$250 million. The local share is estimated at \$14 million to \$18 million.

Existing levees provide about five year flood protection.