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Skagit Valley Herald

Voice of the people

Skagit River flood control

To the Editor:

So the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers got a 15 million dollar chunk of our tax money a while back to use in studies of the Skagit River again.

Somebody gets paid for dumping rock, same as the helicopters, pictures, maps and so on. Realtors want more development to make more and more money. Fishermen want their fish, bird watchers want their eagles, power companies and shareholders want more profits. We could have all this without being too greedy.

In the past there has been enough dams put on the Skagit and its tributaries without fish ladders just to fight a major flood. On Dec. 5, 1975 the high water we had was from orders by the Army Corp of Engineers to not let the upper Baker Dam and Lake Shannon rise over the 10 foot mark because they were afraid of mud slides. Mud and silt had been coming down that Baker River since time began. Water was shot out into the main Skagit River without warning to people down stream in the Hamilton-Lyman areas or to anyone that the river would affect. We were told by the power company that every dam that was built in our valley was for flood control.

Every year we have a run-off, natural or unnatural water backs up into the Nookachamps area. A dam even in the upper area for someone's big areas for a

recreational development to make more money, isn't going to help the people and farmers in the lower area that are getting the back-up of water.

Moving down river to the flats, to Burlington beyond the forks to the mouth of the river, the Corps of Engineers and realtors want the Avon by-pass for water recreation and beautiful home sites along a canal. The water would be there just a few weeks out of the year. Fish would be trapped and mosquitoes would thrive.

What happened to our dike roads? There has been rock dumped into the river for so long that the river is 30 to 50 yards more narrow on both sides of it in most places. Just look at it! I have by boat for years. Is it the dream of farmers on both sides of the river to have more land and a deeper dredged canal for their back yards?

Who do we blame for a 100 or 900 year flood control program? Somebody is going to have to give up something – even land – starting from the mouth of the river on up.

I think we are getting too much federal control and not enough money in the right places. If our county could get that money lost to the Corps every year in study and contracting expensive thoughtless projects, and put it in the hands of good local control to people that know what we

need, then we will have a good program for everyone in the future.

Why wait until we the people of Skagit Valley have to go out and put sand bags in some of these places at the last minute when the river comes up to save houses, cattle and their valuables.

Dredging the river has not proven permanent. Look at LaConner delta land and channel that has round river gravel. When they dredge it each time, the town slips towards the channel and it fills up again.

I have had some ideas you might not agree with environmentally or commercially but we do have a wild river and we are going to have to live with that. Starting from the mouth of the river on up, if some of the government money could buy some of the land on both sides of the river and widen the river by taking the rock out that they have been dumping in and use them to build the dike roads up higher. It would save hauling more in. This would take care of the lower river.

The Nookachamps area flooding could be slowed down tremendously by having a retaining wall and gate at the mouth of Nookachamps Creek, with a pumping station to pump the water back into the river, which will take care of high creek. Of course the gate would be open most of the time on normal flow of river to take care of migrating salmon and steelhead that do come up.

The upper river has been narrowed by the sloughs along the river that have been blocked off by the Corp of Engineers or Soil Conservationist Service. Even Frank Easter of this service agrees with me that the sloughs are a great relief valve for the lower river during time of high water. I spoke to him last Sept. when Ross Slough was being blocked off to make the old Tyler Island Sloughs that come out at the mouth of Gilligan Creek.

I wonder if the biologists of the state game department and state fisheries are aware what damage has been done to thousands of acres of spawning ground and duck habitat that has been lost because of greed by some commercial men wanting more land along the river? The islands that were on the river are really all of ours.

Day Creek Slough is rocked and blocked. Cockerham Island isn't a true island any more. All the way up to Redfern Slough and the Sauk River mouths and on above Rockport. Too much rocking in some places is drying up the sloughs are far as Marblemount. It's starting to look more like a canal all the time.

There are places for an earthen Copper Creek dam. 10 miles of the 14 miles between Marblemount and Newhalem, "for city light", taking away more spawning areas for all resident and migrating fish and more costs for the new highway also.

The Corps of Engineers have a bad record for spoiling many parts of America in projects done by construction companies like "Bechtel" and others. Millions are paid to some of the Corps in backhand money to get a contract, to get billions of our tax paying dollars. I'd trust a beaver dam more.

I think there should be a group of people, besides the Corps of Engineers and business men doing the planning for our valley's flood control.

Come on Voice of the People, say something and let's get something done. The government needs more ideas. It takes all of the horses pulling together to make a team.

A Concerned Skagit River Guide
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