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## Nookachamps, Clear Lake Corps to study flood control problem area

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MOUNT VERNON – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will study the effects of proposed Skagit River flood control measures on the Nookachamps and Clear Lake areas. Corps and Skagit County officials said Tuesday.

And the result of the study, expected by the time the draft environmental impact statement on the project is released in April, could be yet another alternative.

Five levee improvement proposals offering 100-year flood protection to Mount Vernon and Burlington and 50-year protection to rural areas below Mount Vernon are already under consideration.

A sixth alternative incorporating the Nookachamps study could include remedies for the side effects of the overall project, according to Corps Project Manager Vernon Cook.

Mitigating measures could include relocation of those buildings which would suffer the most from higher water due to the higher dikes on the Skagit, he said. Although recent legislation favors non-structural flood control, relocation has never been used before, he commented.

Other measures for the Nookachamps area might include a ring dike around the town of Clear Lake, higher mounds used to shelter livestock during

floods and extension of the Skagit dikes up Nookachamps Creek.

Diking of the Nookachamps is the least likely measure, Cook stated.

“What you may end up with at the end of the Nookachamps study is (a sixth) alternative,” he told an audience at a county Board of Commissioners meeting.

“Remember,” he quipped, “you heard it here first.”

The Nookachamps study would not delay the project and would be funded through the overall project, he added.

Fearing that higher dikes on the Skagit would mean higher water in their homes and fields, Nookachamps residents flooded a Corps of Engineers public workshop Dec. 20 with criticism of what the Corps now considers the best flood control alternative.

A resurrection of the Avon bypass and the Sauk flood containment dam were urged as alternatives to the higher dikes by some Nookachamps residents. Others, pressed for dredging and channel widening operations, particularly at the mouth of the Skagit.

But, in a luncheon meeting with Congressman-elect Al Swift (D-Bellingham) and local flood control officials, Col. John Poteat of the Corps of Engineers warned

local officials not to delay on the levee improvement project.

Swift agreed, saying, “Strong sentiment to look at the Avon bypass or the Sauk dam would mean a virtual halt on the levee improvements.”

“Once you move on any one of the options, you’ll be deciding on all three,” he told the three county commissioners. “Choosing one takes the cost benefits away from all the others.”

The Avon bypass, authorized by Congress in 1936, would face considerable opposition from farmers in its path and from environmentalists, Col. Poteat stated. Requiring the construction of eight new bridges, the bypass to Padilla Bay would be very expensive.

Likewise, a flood containment dam on the Sauk ruled out by inclusion of the Skagit River system among the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers in Congress last fall, would probably not be economically feasible, he explained.

“Friends, let’s be candid – the chance of upstream protection is just not that slick,” he told the luncheon gathering.

“That puts a premium on the dikes,” he added.

The Nookachamps study was a result of the criticism from residents of the area, Cook said.

But the study apparently satisfied those criticisms.

“It sounds to me like you’re doing what we asked you to do,” commented Nookachamps farmer Ken Johnson. “Now, we’ll have to see what you come out with.”

If the results of the Nookachamps study are not completed by the release date of the draft environmental statement and general design memorandum in April, the Corps will not hold up the impact statement to include the study, Cook said.

If not in the draft statement, the Nookachamps study, as well as public

comments, could be included in the final environmental impact statement, he explained.

“We’ll be up here again with what I call the full dog and pony show in late April or early May,” Cook said. “By then, we should know enough about the Nookachamps to say if we will have some structural alternative or not.”