

May 9, 1979

Skagit Valley Herald

Flood impact statement

Confirm opponent's fears of Nookachamps flooding and housing growth

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MOUNT VERNON – A draft environmental impact statement of the Skagit River flood project substantiated two major concerns of opponents: the possibilities of induced farm damage and development of farm land.

Most other impacts of the project – reductions in air and water quality, increases in noise and traffic, and disruption of fish and wildlife – would be present only during the construction period, according to the study.

Written comments to the recently completed draft environmental impact statement (EIS) will be accepted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers until June 15.

Copies of the one-inch-thick document are available at libraries in Anacortes, Burlington, LaConner, Sedro-Woolley and Mount Vernon. City and county officials also have copies.

The EIS was prepared by the Corps of Engineers to study the temporary and long-term effects of the proposed levee improvement project.

As currently proposed, the project would improve levees downstream from Mount Vernon to provide 50-year protection to the Skagit Delta farmland. Levee improvements upstream would provide 100-

year protection to the urban areas of Burlington, Avon and Mount Vernon.

A levee and weir are proposed between Burlington and Sedro-Woolley to limit 100-year overflows to the Samish Valley to the same amount as under present conditions. These two structures will provide the Samish overflow area with 50-year flood protection from Skagit River flooding.

The project encompasses 50 miles, including a ring dike around Burlington.

In all, 40,000 acres will receive 50-year flood protection and 11,800 acres will receive 100-year protection.

Impacts from the project include:

- Reduction in flood damage
- Possible induced flood damages in four unleveed areas.
- Pressure to develop farm lands provided with 100-year protection.
- The loss of about 40 acres of deciduous forest and wetlands.
- Relocation of eight homes and 26 buildings (locations not specified).
- Commitment of about 40 acres of prime farmland to the levee right-of-way.
- Increased noise, turbidity, traffic congestion and exhaust emissions during construction.

The EIS notes the possibility of increased flooding in the Nookachamps/Clear Lake area, the right bank near Sedro-Woolley, the right bank at west Mount Vernon, and the Sterling Road area east of Burlington.

At a 100-year flood level, the project would increase the water level from zero to two feet over current conditions, depending on the location, it says.

To minimize the effects on these areas, the corps studied several possible measures. The most feasible is the purchase of flowage easements on property that might be adversely impacted, the EIS says.

The study acknowledges the opposition from residents of the impacted areas. But it adds that “a major flood event without the project would be disastrous to the whole lower Skagit Valley and as a result to the economy of the Nookachamps area as well.”

The flood control project would not interfere with the proposed construction of Copper Creek Dam and the proposed Skagit nuclear power project near Sedro-Woolley, if these are approved.

The EIS notes that “if the Corps of Engineers’ levee project is constructed at the same time as either Copper Creek or the nuclear power plant, most of the construction labor force in northwest Washington will be required.”

Twenty prehistoric and 34 historic sites that could be affected by the proposed project have been identified in this area, the EIS says.

“These resources must be treated as significant, and thus eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places until they can be sufficiently investigated,” the EIS says.

To determine their eligibility for placement in the National Register, the corps will conduct a survey this spring. When the effects of the project and the

historic significance have been determined for each site, the EIS says, a way to lessen the impact will be designed.

The project should have no impact on American peregrine falcons or bald eagles that winter in the Skagit area, the study says.

The project does not appear to conflict with county or city land use plans.

As currently proposed, construction of the downstream levees would begin in the summer of 1980, with construction of urban levees in 1981.