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11 January 1950

Mr. Magnus Johnson
President, Skagit River Control Association
Route 3
Mount Vernon, Washington

Dear Mr. Johnson:

A recent article appearing in the Mount Vernon Daily Herald indicates that there is some lack of understanding regarding the activities of the Corps of Engineers in relation to flood-control problems on Skagit River. To help clarify the situation, I would like to give you a summary of the present status of our Skagit River flood-control affairs.

The Federal interest in flood control is defined in several laws passed by Congress since 1936. In general, these laws permit a full study and investigation of a flood problem at Federal expense by the Corps of Engineers, followed by construction of any recommended flood-control structures by the Federal Government with local interests, in most cases, paying part of the cost. Congress has authorized a Skagit River flood-control study and after delay caused by the war, it is expected that the report will be completed this year. At the present time, it is not known what work may be recommended and if a favorable recommendation for a project is made, no construction can be undertaken until Congress has specifically authorized the work and appropriated funds for it.

In considering the solution of the Skagit River flood problem, several possible methods are being studied. These methods include storage of flood waters, deepening the present channel, together with raising and strengthening of the present diking system as recently suggested by local interests, and construction of flood water diversion channels. The studies are not complete, and definite conclusions as to the desirability of any particular method have not been made. Before a favorable recommendation for a project can be made, the following conditions are necessary:

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a. The annual cost of the project must be less than the annual benefits expected. The annual cost includes operation and maintenance, interest on the first cost, and amortization of the first cost over a 50-year period. Annual benefits would consist of the estimated average annual cost of flood damage which could be prevented by the project.

b. The proposed work must be of the type desired by the local community, and it should not adversely affect some other important water use.

Floods on the Skagit River may be of very large magnitude if past history is repeated, and therefore expensive measures are required to give an adequate degree of protection. The expense may be heavy for both the Federal Government and local interests because Congress specifically requires that for any flood-control project, except a dam and reservoir, the local community or government must furnish the following requirements:

- a. All lands, easements, and rights-of-way.
- b. Agree to operate and maintain the project works.
- c. Assume any damages arising from the project.

In 1936, Congress adopted the Avon bypass flood diversion channel as a Federal project subject to local interests' furnishing rights-of-way, highway bridge changes, and the other usual requirements of local cooperation. No Federal funds have been appropriated for this project. In 1940, the total estimated first cost was \$3,298,100, of which the local share was \$1,004,500, and it is reasonable to assume that present-day costs would be nearly doubled. To date, local interests have not made any efforts to implement this project. Our present flood-control study will consider this plan, and possible modifications of it, together with other methods of control. It appears unlikely that any project can be recommended in which the local cost will be small, and therefore if effective control of floods is to be realized in the Skagit Valley, a good measure of local financial support is needed.

As pointed out previously, before any new project can be recommended it must be economically justified in that expected benefits must exceed estimated costs. At the present time, we are conducting field appraisals as a step in determining the amount of average annual flood damage. The annual flood damages so obtained will define the maximum expenditure that can be justified for flood-control works, and further engineering studies will ascertain whether or not that expenditure can provide the required degree of flood protection.

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Entirely apart from the specifically authorized Skagit River flood-control studies, this office has limited means available for performing minor emergency flood-control works. In recent years, Congress has made available to the Chief of Engineers comparatively small sums of money for such emergency projects and for flood-fighting activities. The type of work under this authority is primarily for the repair and restoration of existing flood-control works that have been destroyed by floods or are seriously damaged. Each case is investigated separately and final approval and allotment of funds is the responsibility of the Chief of Engineers in Washington, D. C. Under this emergency authority, the Corps of Engineers and local interests jointly constructed the river bank protection just upstream from Burlington. As a result of the recent Skagit River flood, the Corps of Engineers has already repaired a break in the North Fork dike and recommendations have been submitted by the District Engineer for emergency projects to strengthen the Dodge Valley dike and to repair the South Fork dike near Milltown.

I want to assure you and the members of the Skagit River Control Association that careful study is being given your flood problems. As indicated in a previous paragraph, any flood-control plan which would be considered by us for a recommendation must, among other requirements, be one which local interests want. Therefore, at any time during the progress of our investigation you are invited to call on me to discuss the status of our work and to present any suggestions which your association may have on the subject.

Sincerely yours,

Clark BJC
Hopkins JK
Buswell MB

Copies furnished:
Board of County Commissioners
Court House
Mount Vernon, Wash.

Mount Vernon Daily Herald
Mount Vernon, Wash.

B.J. Clark

E. C. ITSCHNER
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Engineer

Little M
Brown M

Symon
Itchner /s/

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