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HPSEN-DG

27 SEP 1977

James King, Editor
The Seattle Times
Post Office Box 70
Seattle, Washington 98111

Dear Mr. King:

This is in regard to your Friday, 16 September editorial on "Ray's Ill-Advised Dip in Skagit River Issue."

The December 1975 flood was incorrectly termed a "100-year flood" by some, including the media, at the height of the flooding. This overstatement may have been due to the heavy damages which occurred. However, it was soon apparent that the recurrence interval was much less than 100 years. The peak which occurred at the Skagit River near Mt. Vernon gage had a recurrence interval of about 10 years. We believe many could be misled by your referring to the event as a "100-year flood," in spite of the quotes.

The levees along the Skagit River passed the 10-year peak flow in December 1975 only because of the successful flood fighting efforts of citizens and local, state, and Federal agencies. Flood damages in the Skagit River Basin were estimated at \$3,247,000. Flood damages prevented by the flood fighting efforts were estimated at \$8,700,000. Damages from a 100-year event would have been about \$35,000,000. These estimates are based on 1975 price levels.

Your statement that, "The Corps of Engineers, which was advocating such a dam earlier, has also drawn up a plan that would adequately protect the lower valley from flooding with a "Sauk dam" is misleading as the statement is totally dependent upon the definition of "adequate." The Washington State flood plain regulations and flood insurance requirements for urbanized areas such as the Burlington - Mt. Vernon area specify protection against 100-year frequency flooding. This degree of flood protection for urbanized areas has been nationally accepted. The existing levees in the lower Skagit River area (Burlington, downstream) provide protection from flood peaks having recurrence intervals of between 4 and 14 years. The difference in levels of protection from 4 to 14 years is related to the difference in levee height along the river from Burlington to the Sound. Utilizing the authorized flood control storage behind Baker Dam will raise

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The level of protection to between 5 and 21 years. Adding the authorized levee and channel improvements would raise the protection to between 11 and 100 years. Addition of the authorized Avon Bypass project that passes 60,000 c.f.s. to Padilla Bay would raise the protection to between 55 and 100 years. Significant increases in the level of flood protection beyond this would require additional upstream storage and/or larger diversion of flood flows past Burlington to Padilla Bay.

A key factor in any decision-making process is evaluation of alternatives and tradeoffs, with the pluses and minuses for each alternative carefully considered. In order to arrive at a valid policy decision, the basic data should be as factual as possible. A Scenic River designation for the upper Skagit River will remove a major flood control option for the lower river area. This fact should be considered in the decision making process.

Attached is a copy of our report on floods of December 1975 and January 1976 that will provide additional factual data regarding these floods.

Sincerely yours,

JOHN A. POTEAT
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Engineer

1 Incl
As stated

cc w/o incl:
Exec Ofc
PAO
Engrg Div
~~Plng-Br~~
Cook

Howard Miller, Chairman
Skagit County Commissioners
Skagit County Courthouse
Mt. Vernon, WA. 98273

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DERRICK
SELLEYOLD
-PAO
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COL POT
MAILROOM
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Mae Demel
Spurlock
Don Thompson