

BILLING CODE: 3710-ER

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

CORPS OF ENGINEERS

**INTENT TO PREPARE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (DEIS),
SKAGIT RIVER FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION STUDY, SKAGIT COUNTY
WASHINGTON**

LEAD AGENCY: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

ACTION: Notice of Intent to prepare a draft Environmental Impact Statement (draft EIS)

SUMMARY: Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is proposing to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Skagit River Flood Damage Reduction Study. This study was requested by Skagit County, Washington because of significant flooding on the Skagit River. Skagit County will provide fifty percent of the funding for this study. An EIS is being prepared because of the potential for impacts on environmental resources, particularly salmonid habitat, and the intense public interest already demonstrated in addressing the flooding problems of the Skagit River. The study is expected to take approximately four years to complete.

DATES: Persons or organizations wishing to submit scoping comments should do so by December 30, 1997. Public comment may also be made at the scoping meeting (date and location to be announced later). Notification of scoping meetings times and locations will be sent to all agencies, organizations and individuals on the project mailing list.

ADDRESSES: Requests for inclusion on the mailing list, future documents, and all comments on the proposed project should be sent to: Michael Scuderi, NEPA Coordinator, Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, P.O. 3755, Seattle, Washington 98124-2255, ATTN: CENWS-EN-PL-ER, telephone (206) 764-3479, FAX (206) 764-4470, or email Michael.R.Scuderi@usace.army.mil.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: General questions concerning the proposed action and the Draft EIS can be directed to: Michael Scuderi, Study Environmental Coordinator (see address above) or Forest Brooks, Project Manager, Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, P.O. 3755, Seattle, Washington 98124-2255, ATTN: CENWS-EN-PL-CP, telephone (206) 764-3456, FAX (206) 764-4470, or email Forest.C.Brooks@usace.army.mil.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The purpose of the Skagit River Feasibility Flood Control study is to better identify the Skagit River flood problems and opportunities that exist to relieve flooding and reduce flood damages, and to develop a flood damage reduction plan that fits Federal law and policy, and is within the capability of the local sponsor to support their required share of the project costs. The Skagit River Basin is located in northwestern Washington state and encompasses 3,140 square miles. The major cities on the Skagit River delta, Mt. Vernon, Burlington, and Sedro Woolley, lie about 60 miles north of Seattle. The study area for the feasibility study will be the Skagit River floodplain downstream of Concrete (river mile 54), with prime emphasis on the Skagit River delta west of Sedro Woolley (river mile 22). Authority for this study is contained in Section 209 of the 1962 Flood Control Act, Public Law 87-874. That section authorized a comprehensive study of Puget Sound , Washington and adjacent Waters, including tributaries, in the interest of flood control, navigation, and other water uses and related land resources.

Alternatives

In the reconnaissance phase for the Skagit Study, the Corps identified two alternative courses of action for further analysis in the feasibility study:

- 1) No Action. Allow the current levee system to remain in place

without a major system wide upgrade. Individual diking districts would continue to operate, maintain, and repair the existing levee system.

- 2) Construct a coordinated levee improvement project that would provide a higher level of flood protection (100-year or greater) for the Burlington and Mt. Vernon urban areas through a system of new and raised levees with overflow sections at critical locations in rural areas designed to overtop without failure (during 25-year or greater events). Sections of the rural levees would also be upgraded to provide a uniform level of protection in rural areas.

Variations to alternative 2 will be examined in detail during the feasibility study and additional alternatives may be created for comparison purposes.

The study could be expanded to include environmental restoration opportunities if a suitable non-Federal sponsor wished to provide funding for considering these elements as part of the Skagit Study.

Scoping

Public involvement will be sought during scoping, plan formulation, and preparation of the EIS in accordance with NEPA

procedures. A public scoping process has been started: 1) to clarify which issues appear to be major public concerns, 2) to identify any information sources that might be available to analyze and evaluate impacts, and 3) to obtain public input on the range and acceptability of alternatives. This Notice of Intent formally commences the scoping process under NEPA. As part of the scoping process, all affected Federal, State and local agencies, Indian Tribes, and other interested private organizations, including environmental groups, are invited to comment on the scope of the EIS. Comments are requested concerning issues of concern, project alternatives, potential mitigation measures, probable significant environmental impacts, and permits or other approvals that may be required by any project.

The following key areas have been identified so far to be analyzed in depth in the draft EIS:

- 1) Flooding Characteristics (existing and with any project)
- 2) Impacts to Fish Habitat
- 3) Impacts to Riparian Habitat
- 4) Impacts to Wetlands
- 5) Impacts to Cultural Resources

Scoping Meeting

Opportunity to comment on the planned study will also be

available at the study scoping meeting which has yet to be scheduled. Details of the meeting time and location will be announced in the local media. Notices will be sent to all agencies, organizations and individuals on the mailing list.

Availability of Draft EIS

The Corps expects to complete preparation of the draft EIS and have review copies of it available by May 2001.

Dated: _____, 1997

SIGNED:

Richard L. Conte

Lt. Colonel, Corps of Engineers

Acting District Engineer