

# Sauk Dam

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SYH

## County's costs for project could run \$20-60 million

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MOUNT VERNON — U.S. Rep. Al Swift, D-2nd Dist., said Thursday local officials can expect a change in attitude from "brusque, arrogant" field representatives for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

On the subject of a proposed Sauk River flood control dam, however, Swift said the cards remain heavily stacked against such a possibility.

In a Skagit Valley Herald interview Thursday afternoon the congressman reiterated his willingness to help the Skagit County Flood Control Committee gather information related to a Sauk River project.

But he also displayed a federal cost-sharing formula that showed local costs for a mixed-use hydroelectric-flood control dam could range from \$20-\$60 million.

After nine months of work, members of the Skagit County Flood Control Committee have prepared draft recommendations that include examination of the possibility of building a flood control and-or hydroelectric dam on the Sauk River.

Such a project would require an amendment to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, federal legislation that currently prohibits dam construction on the Sauk River.

In addition to that hurdle, which Swift said last month would be "virtually impossible" to remove, remaining roadblocks include debate over potential disruption of fish runs and the proposal's cost-benefit ratio.

Swift said an "educated guess" on the cost of a Sauk River dam would be \$400 million.

Skagit flood control subcommittees have tentatively recommended a mixed-use flood control dam with hydroelectric capability and a fisheries enhancement component.

Swift said increased costs attached to the hydro power and enhancement components "don't commensurately increase benefits."

If the Wild and Scenic River Act could be amended and if dam proponents could get by the fisheries issue, said Swift, the cost-benefit ratio would still pose an awesome obstacle.

He said the federal government would pay 90 percent of costs associated with hydroelectric generation but only 75 percent of costs attached to flood control.

Still, Swift said, he would be happy to ask the Army Corps of Engineers for more

The Democrat congressman said he gave that message to members of the Skagit Council of Governments Thursday morning in addition to a report that he has taken action to improve relations between 2nd District residents and FEMA officials.

FEMA's role, said Swift, is basically to save the federal government money associated with disasters such as recurrent flooding. He agreed with angry constituents that "particular (FEMA) field people at work in Whatcom and Skagit counties will never qualify as diplomats."

He also he noted that small communities such as Hamilton and Sumas "do not have the resources to do bureaucratic combat" with FEMA officials.

But a combination of administrative and legislative changes might be the answer to local problems posed by flood control requirements administered by FEMA, he said.

Swift reported that based on complaints from officials and residents in his district, he and U.S. Sen. Henry Jackson met with top FEMA officials who assured him staff attitudes in this district "will change."

He said FEMA administrators Charles Steele and Carl Cook have already met with Whatcom County officials and he will arrange similar meetings soon in Skagit County.

In the past year, said Swift, FEMA field men have been guilty of "a zealous enforcement of what they perceive to be their responsibility."

Administrative changes to improve local relations with FEMA representatives should include giving local people total perspective on federal flood control requirements, said Swift.

"They should explain the entire procedure, including appeals, so people are walking in dead certain about what they're dealing with," he said. Compliance deadlines should also be described in detail, he said, so local officials don't "trip the clock" without knowing it.

Swift said a more difficult option for change would be the legislative route. He noted that a FEMA authorization bill will be reviewed by Congress in September and he said he will check with fellow representatives "to see if anybody else is having problems like this."

If there are many communities in the country with similar problems, said Swift, congressmen representing those communities can examine the authorization bill to see if solutions are possible there.

He cautioned, however, "If no one else has a problem, we haven't got a prayer" as far as legislative action is concerned.

Swift said he talked about flood-related problems Thursday morning with Hamilton Councilman John Smith, Skagit County Commissioner Jerry Mansfield, Mount Vernon Mayor Ruth Gidlund and Burlington officials.

The congressman will be traveling throughout the 2nd District for the next three weeks before Congress reconvenes September 8.