

Flood pundit sees logic in density controls

By STEVE BERENTSON
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BURLINGTON — Skagit River Flood Control committeeman Arnold Hansen said Tuesday a "restricted density floodplain" is the only logical response to flood control demands made by the federal government.

Hansen, who represents the City of Burlington on the county commissioners' advisory committee, made his remarks in a presentation to the Burlington Chamber of Commerce.

The flood control committee's functions are twofold, Hansen told the group. First, they were assigned the task of addressing flood control options and subsequently

they were asked to make a recommendation to meet a federal demand for a Skagit floodway designation.

The floodway, Hansen explained, is necessary to meet federal eligibility requirements for subsidized flood insurance.

He said officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have been "a little overzealous" in their flood control efforts but he said they are doing the proper thing in requiring Skagit residents to use caution rather than counting solely on insurance money to "bail them out."

In reference to FEMA he said, "We have a tendency to think they're illogical —

doing something to us that they shouldn't — but they are doing the logical thing."

Where Hansen and the flood control committee part ways with FEMA officials is in debate over the definition of "reasonable" floodway options.

Drawing actual floodway boundaries, Hansen said, would be ridiculous because Skagit River flood waters go where they want to go in the river delta below Sedro-Woolley.

If actual boundaries were drawn that include one farmer's land and exclude another's, said Hansen, it is conceivable that flood waters could bypass the designated floodway entirely and hit the farmer who lives outside the floodway boundaries.

That type of situation, he argued, would be totally unacceptable to Skagit County residents.

According to the flood control committee's recommendation, establishing actual floodway boundaries would be avoided by accepting a "restricted density floodplain."

That proposal would prohibit property owners in the delta from altering 25 percent of their land in any way that would restrict the flow of floodwater.

Such a proposal is not a ban on development, said Hansen, because floodway property could still be used for such purposes as parking lots and streets as long as no landfill is required.

"Checkerboard development" restrict-

ing water flow would not be allowed even if it met the 25 percent requirement, Hansen noted.

The former Burlington city official and county commissioner told his audience his committee "hasn't come up with anything new."

Their recommendations, he said, match those of a similar group organized in the 1960s. That group had recommended improving the lower river levee system, Baker Lake flood storage, a bypass and a dam on the Sauk River.

Hansen noted that his committee's top priority is still a Sauk River flood control dam. He conceded, however, that "There are many obstacles to overcome that

weren't there 10 years ago."

Those obstacles include fish enhancement concerns, Indian fishing rights and the establishment of a federal Wild and Scenic River System.

Hansen said his committee's Sauk River dam and floodway proposals have been forwarded to officials representing the county and cities affected by flood waters.

Each political entity must deal individually with FEMA in flood control efforts, Hansen said.

On the subject of endorsement of the committee's recommendations to date, he said, "I have every indication they (county and city officials) will probably do that."

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