

Committee wants floodway

MOUNT VERNON — The Skagit County Flood Committee will try to establish a floodway for the lower Skagit River after all.

At their March meeting, the committee members were, for the most part, against doing the floodway work which was requested by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Since then, however, FEMA officials have met with local government representatives and given them this message: if you don't designate a floodway with local comments, then we will do it for you and you won't like what we do.

The floodway designation could significantly impact property values in the county because no new development or construction will be allowed in the floodway area.

A floodway is an area set aside to allow free flow of water when and if the river reaches a 100-year flood stage.

By establishing a floodway, FEMA contends that other, more developed parts of the county will be better protected against flood waters.

While the committee has the opportunity to establish the floodway in areas that are not targeted for development, FEMA officials have said that if the federal government is left to set the floodway, it will be done by computer with no regard for developed or developing areas.

"I think that somebody's going to have to make the decision and I'd rather see it done locally than see someone from outside do it," said committee member Louie Parker of Lyman. With a single exception, Parker's fellow committee members agreed.

"Designating a floodway isn't flooding anyone," said Arnold Hansen of Burlington. "The water's going to take its natural course. All we have to do is provide some zoning constraints for that potential flood water to go."

"Floodway designation is zoning and do we want someone outside this area to do our zoning for us? The answer, of course, is no."

Only one committee member voted against the proposal, saying the committee lacked the expertise to do the job fairly.