

# Flood group contemplates dam on Sauk

**MOUNT VERNON** — Army Corps of Engineers officials agreed Thursday night to supply local residents with technical data gathered in the late 1960s in consideration of a containment dam on the Sauk River.

Members of the Skagit County commissioner-appointed Skagit River Flood Control Committee met for more than two hours last night in a general "question and answer session" with three Seattle representatives of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In discussion of their work to date, committee members told the federal officials their investigations address "dealing with the water or trying to prevent it from getting here."

A highly controversial option under consideration — a dam on the Sauk River — had been studied by the Corps in the late '60s.

"I think there was a site," said Corps representative Ernie Sabo. "I don't know why it was stopped."

Corps spokesman Dick Regan termed the containment dam a "logical" option.

"As far as flood control for the Skagit River that's the most logical way to do it," he said.

But he quickly noted the Skagit's inclusion in the federal Wild and Scenic River system.

Because of that, he said, "it's been a dead issue for us for a long time."

Regan agreed with committee members that because of provisions of the Wild and Scenic River Act, approval of a Sauk River dam "would definitely take an act of Congress."

"Now," he said, "you're getting way out of my line of expertise."

Asked whether a recommendation for a Sauk River dam would be forwarded to the Skagit County commissioners, Committee Chairman Jess Knutzen said, "We are not prepared to make that statement yet. I wouldn't like to prejudge the committee's decision."

Knutzen noted obstacles to the Sauk River dam proposal — including problems with fish, residents on the river, the Wild and Scenic designation and cost-benefit questions.

He said final committee recommendations will not likely be made until November.

Regan explained early in the meeting that he had come unprepared to offer detailed technical data but he said the Corps would make such information available to the committee or anyone else on request.

The Corps spokesman suggested someone from his office could "bone up" in preparation

for further committee meetings if they so desired.

Meanwhile, Regan had a number of observations and suggestions to make to the committee, whose job it will be to recommend a designated floodway for the federal government.

First of all, he said, "I think what FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Act) is looking for is general ideas." FEMA is the federal agency that will pass final judgment on floodway designation proposals.

Regan said dredging is a realistic method of flood control but he concluded, "It isn't done."

A primary reason it isn't done, he said, is because Corps projects require continued maintenance by a local sponsor after such work. In the case of dredging, he said, no one could afford to maintain the project after the Corps was finished. Besides, as someone on the committee pointed out, approval of permits for such a project would be doubtful.

Regan predicted a complete topographic analysis of the lower Skagit area will be started "next year or the following year."

Once the Corps has such statistics, he said, it would be "somewhat simple" to analyze floodway proposals by computer.

In discussion of the politically hot issue of establishing floodway boundaries, Regan suggested the committee present FEMA with "suggestions rather than recommendations."

Any ultimate solution, he said, will result from "trial and error."

For their part, frustrated committee members asked for more help from the Corps, expressing fear that their work may ultimately be unacceptable to either local people or the federal government.

Committee member Denny LeGro said, "If we just do a floodway with no promise of a blessing by the feds, how do we sell it (locally)?"

Committee member Steve Ladd responded to that question with the observation that perhaps the best decision for the local committee will be to come up with ideas and have federal officials review them before they give the recommendations their final stamp of approval.

Regan acknowledged the floodway designation work is "an engineering and political nightmare," but he said the Corps is strictly limited in its activities.

At one point in the meeting he emphasized that FEMA does not necessarily have to call on the Corps for technical studies. They can, he said, select any consultant they wish to do the work.