Flood group amends recommendation after emergency meeting

by John Draper

The Skagit River Flood Control Committee's hopes for 100-year flood protection may be less sure after a run-in with some U.S. Army Corps of Engineers figures.

The figures, discovered by Committee member Larry Kunzler, relate to the proposed Sauk River dam, something the committee's report said, in bold letters, "Is the only action that will give full 100-year protection to the majority of the Skagit Valley."

This is an untrue statement, according to 1965 Corps figures quoted by Kunzler.

A 100-year flood is not, as the name seems to say, a flood that happens once every hundred years. Over a 30-year period, there is one chance in four a 100-year flood will occur. When it does, it will bring around 270,000 cubic feet of water per second.

Kunzler presented the figures at an emergency meeting of the committee held Monday night, just before the report was to go to public hearing on Tuesday. At this same emergency meeting committee members, moved by the figures, decided to protect the committee's credibility by changing two parts of the report claiming 100-year protection from a Sauk River dam.

"We made a statement that could be construed as being misleading to the people of this valley," Kunzler said. "If we had done an in-depth study we would have come up with these figures I have here."

The Committee has been working for about a year. Their 30-page report is the result of their work. The report stresses the primary need for a feasibility study for a Sauk River dam but also calls for limited dike improvements, debris removal, flood-plain management programs and collection of cross-sectional data from various river locations.

The primary nature of the Sauk River in this proposal was lessened a bit by the Committee's vote Monday night to change the report's statement that the Sauk dam will give 100-year protection so that it read, "This is the only action that will give *maximum* flood protection..."

"If it's 25-year protection, that's

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maximum," County flood engineer Don Nelson explained.

He added that the original wording went through "because it didn't jump out at anyone."

Its deficiency became clear, though, when Kunzler read his Army Corps of Engineers 1965 study. According to this study, a Sauk River dam would have to have 250,000 acre feet of storage to provide 100-year flood protection.

Since this report was put out, however, the Baker River Dam was constructed, providing 75,000 acre feet of storage. Kunzler pointed out that this isn't enough. In the Committee report's summary of alternatives, it claims a 255-foot high Sauk Dam would provide 134,000 acre feet of flood control, "a very desirable level of flood protection."

Kunzler pointed out, though, that such a dam, including Baker River dam storage, provides less than the 250,000 acre feet the Corps claimed necessary for 100-year flood protection.

Furthermore, Kunzler said, the Corps claimed if a Sauk dam was higher than 200 feet, as was the one outlined by the committee's report, it would flood the Stillaguamish River.

"No one wants to intentionally flood anyone to protect themselves," Kunzler said.

Nelson pointed out, though, that there are maps showing a possible dike along the Darrington area that could stop such flooding. The problem, as Kunzler said he saw it, was getting the people in Darrington, Arlington and Marysville to accept it.

"How much are they going to fight when we start sending water their way?" he asked.

Committee members present at the emergency meeting decided to avoid any such outcry by deleting the part of the summary of alternatives that describes the "desireable" Sauk dam of 255 feet and 134,000 acre feet of storage.

They also played it safe by changing a sentence in the same paragraph to read, "The Lower Sauk site, about five miles upstream from the mouth of the Sauk River, *could* provide a very desireable level of flood protection."

Before, the sentence had read such a dam "would" provide a desirable level.