

County asked to back flood-control package

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MOUNT VERNON — Members of the Skagit River Flood Control Committee and representatives of several local jurisdictions gathered in a public hearing Tuesday to urge the Skagit County Board of Commissioners to approve the recommended flood-control plan.

Some 35 people crowded the commissioners' public hearing room Tuesday afternoon to hear a review of the plan and offer comments to the board.

The plan involves a package of flood control recommendations including a dam on the Sauk River, dike and levee improvements, debris removal, floodplain management programs and a restricted density floodplain.

Comments in support of the plan were voiced by representatives of Burlington, Mount Vernon, the Mount

Vernon chambers of commerce and the Skagit County Board of Realtors.

Final action on adoption of the plan and forwarding of the information to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was delayed pending the return of Commissioner Jerry Mansfield, who was absent from the session Tuesday.

Two "very limited changes" were made in the wording of the flood control plan document as explained by Committee Chairman Jess Knutzen.

The changes, made in an emergency meeting of the committee Monday night, include indication that the proposed Sauk River dam would provide "maximum" flood protection to the majority of the Skagit Valley rather than "full 100-year flood protection" as written in the first draft of the document.

Making the change will add "credi-

bility to our committee report," Knutzen said, citing that "we could not guarantee 100-year flood protection. It was premature to suggest that would be the case and we didn't want to mislead anyone."

An additional change was made in the storage-description portion of the document discussing that a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study indicates possible dam sites at several locations in the Sauk-Suiattle Basin. Rather than stating a dam location some five miles upstream from the mouth of the Sauk River would provide a very desirable level of flood protection, the wording was changed to read that such a structure "could" provide such protection.

Again, Knutzen stated that such a change provided more credibility to the committee report while a study of such flood control measures would be

pursued to determine what location would provide maximum protection.

Aside from the wording changes outlined, the committee report maintains that the dam on the Sauk River would be the "only solution offering flood relief to all of Skagit County," according to Bob Hulbert, chairman of the upriver storage sub-committee.

Hulbert said that the committee realized that a number of problems exist with the proposal to build a dam, including restrictions under the Wild and Scenic designation of the Skagit River and the high costs involved.

"Certainly a society that put a man on the moon can solve the flooding problems of Skagit County," Hulbert said.

Neil Hamburg, chairman of the containment sub-committee, cited that a total of 50 miles of diking has been constructed in Skagit County since the

late 1800s when the first dike districts were organized. Over the years, Hamburg said that the construction materials, base width and height have varied, resulting in the recommendation for dike improvements.

"No matter what we do we are still going to be dependent on the levees to a certain extent," Hamburg said.

The proposed program would include analysis of the present condition of the dikes and upgrading of those problem areas to the "present highest level of protection" of the dikes, which is estimated to accommodate approximately a 50-year flood event. Funding for such an improvement program is proposed to be divided between the county and local diking districts with a minimum expenditure by each of some \$400,000 in a year.

In addition to levee improvements, a

dredging and channelization program would be pursued to remove log jams and debris from sloughs and channels, according to Louie Parker, committee member.

"Many of these channels should be carrying the water rather than the communities," Parker said in recommending a survey of sloughs and channels needing cleaning.

The committee has also proposed a restricted density floodplain approach to require 25 percent of the property in the floodplain area remain at the current elevation.

Committee member Larry Kunzler stressed that the 25/75 figures are "not even close to being cast in concrete" but are arbitrary figures pending a complete hydraulic analysis by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.