



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Area Office

2625 Parkmont Lane

Olympia, Washington 98502

file FWS

April 6, 1979

Colonel John A. Poteat, Jr.  
District Engineer  
Seattle District, Corps of Engineers  
P.O. Box C-3755  
Seattle, Washington 98124

Dear Colonel Poteat:

This constitutes the final revised report of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the effects of the Skagit River Levee and Channel Improvement Project on fish and wildlife resources. It has been prepared under the authority of and in accordance with the provisions of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (48 Stat. 501, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 661 et seq.).

These comments are based on engineering data and related information provided by the Corps of Engineers through March 1, 1979. This report supplements and updates our Service report dated May 20, 1964, which addressed the proposed Sauk River Dam, the Avon Bypass, and a more limited levee improvement proposal for flood control in the lower Skagit River Valley. The levee improvement proposal is now in the advanced engineering and design stage, and this report is intended for inclusion in your General Design Memorandum for the project.

Copies of the draft report were reviewed by Washington Department of Game, Washington Department of Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service, and Skagit System Tribal Cooperative. Letters of comment and concurrence from these agencies are attached to this report. We believe this report incorporates all recommendations received. Additionally, this final report reflects the changes in project design which have occurred since the date of the draft report, as well as mitigation features discussed in the January 25, 1979, Fish and Wildlife Mitigation Workshop at the Seattle District Office. The present project design is the result of considerable coordination and planning between our respective staffs and State resource agencies. We believe the present plan significantly reduces impacts to fish and wildlife resources of the lower Skagit River Valley.



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## DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

The Skagit River Basin occupies approximately 3,140 square miles of land on the west slope of the Cascade Range. A portion of the upper basin, approximately 400 square miles, lies in British Columbia, Canada. Basin elevations range from sea level to over 10,900 feet, and there are active glaciers and several peaks with perennial snow cover, including Mount Baker, Mount Shuksan, and Glacier Peak.

The Skagit River is the largest river entering Puget Sound. It originates in Canada and flows 135 miles south and west to Skagit Bay (Figure 1). About seven miles upstream from the bay, the river divides into the North and South Forks which in turn branch into a number of subsidiary channels. The major tributaries of the Skagit River are the Baker, Sauk, and Cascade Rivers. Baker River joins Skagit River near river mile 56. Baker River is blocked near its mouth by Baker Dam and upstream by Upper Baker Dam for hydroelectric generation. Sauk River is a large glacier-fed stream entering Skagit River near river mile 66. Cascade River, also glacier-fed, originates at the summit of the Cascade Range and joins Skagit River at Marblemount, near river mile 79. The upper Skagit River is impounded near river mile 97 by City of Seattle for hydroelectric generation.

Basin uplands contribute forest products to the local and regional economy. In its lower reaches, the Skagit River has a broad, fertile floodplain which is intensively farmed and is noted for production of vegetables, vegetable seeds, and other specialty crops. Dairy farming and cattle raising are also prevalent.

Fish and wildlife values of Skagit River Basin and attendant recreational opportunities are significant. Skagit River is the single largest producer of salmon in the Puget Sound region, and is second only to the Columbia River as a source of salmon in Washington State. Skagit River drainage produces large numbers of pink (odd years), coho, chum, and chinook salmon that support a multimillion dollar sport and commercial fishery within Puget Sound and coastal waters alike. Washington Department of Fisheries estimates that the combined average annual value of Skagit salmon runs is in excess of five million dollars. The total adult spawner escapement goal for Skagit River salmon approaches 380,000 during odd years of pink salmon runs, the progeny of which would number over 38 million juvenile fish.

Value of the Skagit River steelhead trout fishery also exceeds any other stream entering Puget Sound, with a harvest of over 22,000 fish during peak seasons. Other game fish, including searun cutthroat trout and Dolly Varden char, generate substantial additional value and public interest.

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The impacts related to siltation resulting from work within the river and runoff from unvegetated slopes should be discussed. Impacts of turbidity include reduced light penetration and food production, decreased ability of juvenile salmonids to locate food organisms, and interference with an extensive sport fishery. Levee construction and revegetation must be designed and scheduled to avoid siltation problems.

DISCUSSION

Page 20, paragraph 2

We suggest the latter part of the second sentence read....." and impact to wetlands must be minimized to the maximum extent possible...

Page 20, paragraph 3

Again, substitute must for should in the last sentence.

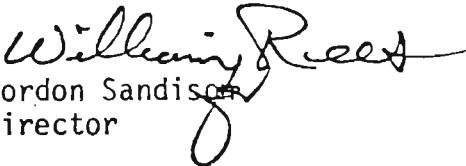
RECOMMENDATIONS

Page 23, Rec. 4

Change "all reasonable measures". to "all precautionary measures"

With the above change in mind, the Department of Fisheries endorses the ten recommendations as written.

Sincerely,

  
Gordon Sandison  
Director

jp

cc: Russ Orrell

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