



United States Department of the Interior

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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DRAFT

MAY 09 2001

MAY 7 2001

RECORDED IN THE PLANNING AID LETTER

Colonel Ralph H. Graves, District Engineer
Corps of Engineers, Seattle District
P.O. Box 3755
Seattle, WA 98124-2255

Re: Planning Aid Letter, Skagit River Flood Feasibility Study

This letter is in response to the last Skagit Flood Risk Management Workgroup, dated April 26, 2001. At that meeting, we learned that the local sponsor, Skagit County, is considering removal of the language that incorporates appropriate fish and wildlife habitat improvements as part of the project purpose.

We are concerned about this action and urge the Corps of Engineers (Corps) to retain the language including fish and wildlife habitat improvements within the project purpose. Flood control projects and land use changes have eliminated much of the habitat needed by salmonids in the lower Skagit River and delta. Despite the degradation that has resulted from human activities, the watershed as a whole is extremely rich in fish and wildlife resources. It supports all five species of Pacific salmon, anadromous steelhead and cutthroat trout, native char, and a great multitude of resident trout. Species warranting special protection under the Endangered Species Act, such as Puget Sound chinook, coastal/Puget Sound bull trout, and the bald eagle, are dependent upon the habitat in the lower Skagit River. These species are an important regional resource, and improving habitat in the lower river is of great importance to their survival and recovery.

In our planning aid letter dated October 10, 2000, we indicated support of a feasibility study that aimed to both minimize the risk of flood damages and improve fish and wildlife habitat in the Skagit River valley. Our support was based on the understanding that both the Corps and the local sponsor intended to develop a flood strategy to meet these multiple objectives. In this time of Endangered Species Act listings, when so many of our native salmonids are struggling to survive, we do not want to see another flood control project that ignores the needs of fish and wildlife. We need to see a project that reflects our best collective thinking about how to solve a complex problem with benefits for multiple stakeholders.

The Skagit Flood Risk Workgroup has devoted many hours to developing a project that addresses a broad range of needs, including habitat improvements. We urge the Corps to honor the work that has already been done and retain the language about habitat improvements as part

of the project purpose. We believe that maintaining the broader purpose will result in a project that is more supportable by diverse stakeholders and has a better chance of eventually being approved and funded for construction.

This planning aid letter is being provided under the provisions of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (48 Stat. 401, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 661, et seq.), but it not intended to fulfill Section 2(b) of this Act. If you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact Lou Ellyn Jones at 360-753-5822 or Lynn Childers at (360) 753-5831,

Sincerely,



Ken S. Berg, Manager
Western Washington Office

cc: NMFS (Tonnes)
USACE (Pierce)
USACE (Scuderi)
WDFW Region 4 (Brokes)
WDFW Region 4 (Buchanan)
Skagit Cooperative (Wasserman)
Skagit County Public Works (VanDer Veen)
Shirley Solomon, P.O. Box 2856, Mt. Vernon, WA 98273