

# THE MOUNT VERNON ARGUS

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### Skagit Flood Protection

Do the two Seattle City Light dams on the Skagit river assure us that days of Skagit valley floods are at an end?

That is a question of vital interest to all residents of the valley. It can be answered conditionally, especially since the recent freshets that sent the river to within two feet of the level of grave danger.

The provisional answer is that the dams can be, as they have been in the last two weeks, used to hold down flood crests. There is as yet no assurance that they will prove adequate to prevent serious flood rise in all cases, particularly in November or December.

That is apparently the opinion of the county engineering office and also of engineers for City Light. They point out that, after all, Diablo and Ross dams are power dams. Seattle depends upon them for electricity and therefore some water has to be kept impounded at all times. City Light engineers say that "to maintain storage for downstream power plants and to provide sufficient 'head' for the generators that will be installed below the dam, the reservoir behind Ross dam must be kept at least half full."

The one condition that close observers of the river fear most is the combination of heavy rains, heavy mountain snows and a temperature change that would melt the snows rapidly, a condition that is most likely to occur in November or December, if at all, according to County Engineer Hjalmar Walberg. In such an event, all the combined water storage available behind the Skagit dams might not be sufficient to hold back a serious flood, just as the Columbia river dams, huge as they are, have not prevented the disastrous Washington-Oregon floods this season.

But the City Light dams definitely have forestalled serious flood conditions in the current freshet period. At its crest last week, the Skagit reached 21 feet at Mount Vernon, two feet below the point at which danger of dikes being overflowed or washed out would become serious, Walberg reports.

"Ross dam was used to hold back water for ten days," Walberg told The Argus Wednesday. "It helped keep the river level down by possibly several feet."

As the Seattle Times reported Sunday from an interview with City Light officials, "if the 567,000 acre feet (of freshet waters purposely held behind Ross dam) had been added to the water flowing down the lower Skagit river, after its junction with the Sauk near Rockport, the lower valley probably would be having its flood problem right now."

The lower valley needs to continue to maintain its dikes, and to watch them carefully at freshet time, but at least it has some protection that it once did not have.

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