

# THE MOUNT VERNON ARGUS

MAY 11, 1967

FLOOD PLAIN

APRIL 1967

INFORMATION STUDY

SKAGIT RIVER BASIN

WASHINGTON



**HIGH WATER . . . REGULATIONS!**—This portion of cover page of a state report released in Mount Vernon Wednesday, stressing forthcom-

ing stringent regulation on use of valley "flood plain" lands, shows Conway during 1951 flood, with dike break at lower left.

—Argus Scanagraving.

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5-11-67

## Clamp on Valley!

State Report Issued Here Wednesday  
Defines Federal Order Restrictions

A Skagit river flood plain information survey that will restrict, guide and control use of virtually all lowlands in the Skagit valley was unveiled in Mount Vernon Wednesday afternoon by Gregory Hastings, state flood control supervisor, and H. Maurice Ahlquist, director of the department of conservation.

With the report, Hastings handed out to a crowd of city, port, diking district, county and federal public officials copies of a presidential order issued last August that is key to the new valley regulations. This order directs all federal executive department agencies to approve constructions, loans, road work and other federal activities in flood plain areas, subject to some exceptions.

The two-part report consisted of a summary booklet, with Skagit basin maps showing the restricted areas, and a voluminous technical report, which will be on file at the county planning office. The technical report is intended for use in public planning and for land developers, their engineers and architects.

The reports were prepared by the U. S. Corps of Engineers at request of the state department of conservation.

"Controlled use" appears key to the federal order and the Skagit Basin reports. Out of this concept may come prohibitions on construction adjacent to the river, requirements that new homes and other structures in the "flood plain" be built above flood levels or "flood-proofed," restrictions on density of housing developments, and requirements that diking projects mate with others and bridges be built above possible

Zoning is declared by the report to be the most effective means of preventing flood damage, "in the absence of flood control."

Completion of the county's permanent, detailed zoning ordinance has been delayed for receipt of the state technical report, Planner Wayne Kite told The Argus Wednesday.

Objective of the kind of zoning the report proposes, it says, "is to reserve the flood plain for those uses which are best suited to it and the least subject to damage from high water." It adds:

"The part of the flood plain subject to inundation every few years could be zoned for agriculture, including buildings necessary for farm operation. Public and commercial activities which can recover quickly from inundation could be allowed, such as parks, playfields, parking lots, and drive-in theaters. A useful method for determining the limits of this zone would be to use the high water mark on one of the larger recorded floods. For example, limits of a skagit river flood having a frequency of 50

years. . ."

A 50-year flood is defined as one such as occurred in 1920 when the recorded Skagit stream flow at Sedro Woolley was 210,000 cubic feet per second. The report's detailed maps show areas that would be hit by such a flood and also fringe lands beyond that would be affected by a less-frequent 275,000 cubic foot flood. The most severe flood listed from 1896 to date was 220,000 feet in 1909, when the dike broke southeast of Avon and the river flowed southward across the flats along the Avon-Allen road.

The report points out that some areas may be flooded by a 90,000-foot flood, while others would be safe up to 140,000 cubic feet. "Floods of these magnitudes," it says, are expected to recur at frequencies of three and 14 years, respectively." It estimates annual flood damages average \$2,216,000 at 1963 prices.

One improvement in flood plain safety since 1953 has been the storage provided by Ross dam, the report advises. It will hold back about 20,000 cubic

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feet per second of flood waters.

Noting that "early settlers . . . had the good judgment to build their homes on the highest available part of their holdings," and, "as a result, flood damage along many streams has been confined primarily to crops," the report warns:

"The danger is that promoters of new housing sites, shopping centers, and motels may lack a long-range viewpoint and unintentionally saddle future owners with flood-susceptible, depreciated and hazardous property."

Some of the more than 70 attending Wednesday's meeting, especially those interested in home financing, left shaking their heads at the new regulations they foresaw.