

Skagit Farmers Protesting Dike Location 'Walls Off' Their Lands

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Skagit County farmers are "walled off" from their lands in Burlington and they are fighting it.

The "wall" is a new dike which crosses a bend of the Skagit river about five miles east of Burlington. It is being built by Dike District 12, designed to protect the Burlington and surrounding areas from possible floods by the Skagit river.

Eight acres of farm land owned by Carl Johnson, Lawrence Johnson and Victor Atchley will be cut off from the dike when it is completed. The new dike will leave a dirt and rock wall behind the property. The present dike is located a few miles closer to Burlington than the Section road.

The three families want the dike moved so that the Skagit river more closely follows the line of the dike. Residents

of Sterling, a farming community 600 acres up the river, have written to State Sen. Paul N. Luvira of Anascoetes protesting the location of the new dike.

Mrs. Johnson says that she and her husband have a lawyer fighting the dike placement for them.

"About half of the people of Burlington are for us," she said, "they think it is an awful thing they are doing to us out here."

The land for the dike, which has already been acquired by Dike District 12, follows the old railroad logging grade from the Burlington acreage towards Sedro-Woolley. Lawrence Boettcher, who owns 18 acres in front of the new dike location, is sharply critical of the dike plans.

"Why was the land beyond the railroad left out of Dike District 12?" he asks. "That's the question we can't answer. For the future growth of Burlington the dike is too close to the city limits. If they followed the river it would leave much valuable land for future residential development."

The right-of-way for the dike is being cleared by bulldozers and the route is marked by stakes.

Mrs. Florence Johnson said she and her husband are "almost sick" over the situation.

"My husband was born on this land and has lived here for 60 years," she said. "We built our new house high so it would be protected from floods, but it won't be any good now because the dike would raise the water level two feet if we have a flood."

All three families agree that there is little question of the authority of the Dike district to build on the land it has, but they feel they should receive damages for the loss in value of their land if the line of the dike is not changed.

Mrs. Edith Atchley agreed a new dike is necessary.

"But we want at least some of our land taken in by running the dike in front of the Johnsons' house."

The Atchley's do not live on the land, but grow strawberries on their acreage. The Johnsons raise alfalfa and bachelor Boettcher grows oats on his property.



PAST AND FUTURE—Lawrence Boettcher shows the past and possible future high water marks in his barn from Skagit river floods. The lower mark is the water level reached in the flood of 1951. Boettcher shows with the higher mark where he thinks the water will rise when the new dike is completed east of Burlington. The dike will back the water up at least two feet higher on his property in case of a flood, said Boettcher.