

Nine-Mile \$500,000 Barge Route in Skagit Sought

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Mount Vernon today renewed its long fight to win status as an inland port by creation of an all-year nine-mile \$500,000 barge route down the silt-choked channel of the Skagit river to salt water below LaConner.

Members of the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce board touched off the renewed drive in letters to Sen. Henry M. Jackson and Congressman Jack Westland in Washington, D.C., urging federal assistance.

Receives Copies

Mrs. Anna Grimison, president of Skagit River Navigation and Trading company which currently operates shallow-draft sternwheelers on the Skagit, will receive copies of the letters to Westland and Jackson.

If she indicates that river dredging will benefit river commerce, the Chamber said, a hearing will be asked with the Army Engineers.

The Engineers estimate that about six miles of dredging would be necessary, with the federal government bearing bulk of the cost if the project is approved. Approval would depend on area ability to show annual savings of at least \$350,000, the Engineers said.

The last major improvement work on the channel was completed in 1911, and dredging of the river was entirely discontinued in 1941. Today, a government snag boat is the lone craft assigned to clear river jams.

Westland, however, in a letter to the Mount Vernon Chamber, offered hope of winning a change in federal attitude.

Need Justification

"The Army Engineers may review the situation and perhaps react favorably to a request for improved conditions at the mouth of the river proper, if justification can be shown," Westland said.

Delta silt at the mouth of the Skagit is one of the main obstacles to passage of all but shallow draft craft.

The project won immediate support from Mount Vernon officials and industry spokesmen.

"The Skagit river would become another outlet for transportation for Mount Vernon and the Chamber of Commerce should spark-plug it," Ted Reep, Chamber president, said.

N. H. Peterson, plant manager of Superior Cement in Concrete, said: "There is a very good possibility our company would send bulk shipments of cement via the Skagit river if it were dredged." The cement plant now exports its products by rail and truck.

Officials of the Carnation company in Mount Vernon said the firm, which now receives an average of 350 tons of tin plate from Seattle via a Skagit Navigation company's sternwheeler,

"probably would make more extensive use of river shipments if the channel was improved."

Seek Schedules

Spokesmen for Northwest Darigold association plant in Burlington were in agreement, citing need for regular schedules as a vital factor in water shipments.

The navigation company now must wait for high tides to carry heavy cargoes over the delta shoals at the mouth of the river. Darigold also gets its carloads of tin plate by river.

Proponents of the channel plan pointed out that recent development of slack water on the Columbia river has vastly increased use of low-cost barge traffic up that route to eastern Washington and ultimately into Idaho.

Growth in tonnage of cement and chemicals has been particularly outstanding on the Columbia since completion of the McNary dam.

Mount Vernon officials also eyed possibility for greatly expanded shipment of logs and lumber downstream to salt water from the county's high timber stands. Channel deepening would permit extensive tugboat operations on the river.

Jim Dunlap of Dunlap Towing Co. said his company tows 5,000,000 board feet of timber down the Skagit river in a month.

Trouble Develops

"We didn't have any trouble with our log rafts last year, but we are running into trouble now getting out of the mouth of the river with bundle rafts of logs that draw more water," Dunlap said.

Dunlap says a jetty is needed near the mouth besides dredging if the river is to stay navigable. He said that Puget Sound Pulp and Timber has over a billion board feet of timber on its land which could be sent down the Skagit river.

Advocates also cited possibility of attracting large numbers of coastal pleasure craft into the inland route from salt water, and a consequent boom in tourist revenues through creation of a safe landlocked "harbor."

Additionally, the project won support from the county's only deep water port, the city of Anacortes. According to Anacortes' mayor, Dr. Raymond Pinson:

"Anacortes status as a deep water port would not be affected, since the Skagit channel would not be deepened enough to divert any ocean-going traffic. This city certainly would not resist start of barge traffic up the Skagit. What is good for one community in the county is good for the whole county," he said.

The Anacortes port district now clears about 60 seagoing ships a year, with exports running heavily to lumber and canned goods.