

Skagit Hits Crest; Some Flood Danger Persists Over Lowlands

High Waters Begin To Recede Slowly

Dike workers, engineers, and Skagit County farmers had their fingers crossed this morning as they shoved a collective "thumb" into leaking and soggy dikes along the Skagit River.

The river reached its peak in the Skagit Valley at 5 p.m. yesterday at 25.7 feet at Mount Vernon. Unlike the flood of a week ago the river did not start to drop quickly, but stayed up over 25 feet until 1 a.m. this morning. At 9 a.m. this morning it was 24.7 feet.

Though the dikes protecting low lying farm lands have held together, thanks to the work of hundreds of heroic workers laying sandbags, officials are still worried that the saturated dikes still could give way even though the peak of the river has passed.

Flood Possible

Associate County Engineer Jack E. Frets put it this way:

"Once the river drops to 20 feet we should be fairly safe, but even then a major break in any of the dikes could flood a lot of farm land. A 12-foot tide will start going out a noon and things should be a little better after that, but we probably won't be able to breathe easily until 8 tonight."

The tide at the mouth of the Skagit acts as a dam against the outflow of the flood river, slowing down the flow of water as it passes the patched-up Fresh Water Slough dike break near Ted Lundeen's home on Fir Island.

The reason for the long crest of the river is that the main tributaries of the Skagit, such as the Sauk, Cascade, and Baker rivers, reached their peaks at different times, thereby keeping the Skagit up.

34.5 Feet Hit

A high point of 34.5 feet was hit at Concrete Thursday at 10 p.m.

The readings at Concrete then began to drop but as the offshoots of the Skagit reached their high marks the level came back up to 33.74 yesterday at 1 p.m.

At 9 a.m. this morning the Concrete readings were down to 27 feet. There usually is a 12 to 16 hour period before the Concrete readings are reflected in higher or lower water levels in Mount Vernon.

Assistant County Engineer Harold Strombom paid tribute to the work of county residents and servicemen from the Naval Air Station on Whidbey Island in staving off a possible major break in the dikes in the south part of the county.

A work force of 250 sailors and marines from the air station has been toiling in the area to relieve exhausted farmers and school students who have been sandbagging at Fresh Water Slough and Fisher's Slough.