

MY WASHINGTON D.C. TRIP EXPERIENCE¹

As a private citizen who has worked on and been involved with the Skagit River flood issue for over 30 years, more specifically the last two plus years almost solely with respect to invalidating the 1923 Stewart figures, and the only “private citizen” representative serving on the Skagit River Impact Partnership (SRIP), I was invited to be part of a delegation to travel to Washington DC and meet with elected and federal government officials to give a presentation on Mr. Stewart’s findings. The title of the presentation was “**James E. Stewart Work Product Goes to D.C.**” The presentation can be viewed by simply clicking on the link provided. The purpose of the presentation was to lobby the Corps of Engineers and FEMA to take a second look at Mr. Stewart’s work product which on its best day as the presentation shows is highly questionable and should not be relied on either by the Corps or FEMA for the determination of flood control projects, dam storage or flood elevation maps. The presentation is based solely on historical evidence that Mr. Stewart wrote. All of the evidence used in the presentation is posted on www.skagitriverhistory.com.

Other individuals in the delegation were Mayor “Gus” Tjeerdsma of Burlington, John Shultz, Attorney for Dike District 12, and Chal Martin, Skagit County Public Works Dept. Director. The three County Commissioners’ were also in DC on other county business however; from time to time Commissioner Dahlstedt and Commissioner Munks attended meetings the delegation also attended.

LEGISLATIVE STAFF MEETING

The SRIP delegation never got to meet with any elected officials however did meet with some of their legislative staff with the exception of Senator Cantwell’s staff who evidently forgot about the meeting and didn’t show up. You would think that when your constituents come all the way across country to meet with your staff that they at least would have the courtesy to show up. I was most impressed with Senator Murray’s staff. They seemed very attentive and genuinely interested in what we had to say. My biggest disappointed with all of the staff is that none of them offered to take the Stewart presentation materials and send a cover letter to FEMA, the Corps nor USGS and ask for a written response. When Senator Jackson or Senator Magnuson would receive written comments from a Skagit County constituent they would immediately forward those comments to the agencies and ask that they respond. My files are replete with those kind of letters and I fully expected staff to do exactly that however that offer was never forthcoming. It is clear to me that we don’t have the same kind of leadership that “Scoop” and “Maggie” once delivered to the people of Skagit County. Representative Larson’s staff followed us around to all of our meetings with the government agencies however never supported us and in fact at the meetings with the Corps and FEMA seemed to go out of their way to support the government agencies. This was very upsetting and something I as an individual will not forget at the voting booth.

¹ The views expressed in this paper are entirely my own and may or may not represent the views of others who were part of the delegation.

CORPS OF ENGINEERS MEETING

The meeting with the Corps of Engineers was recently summed up at a public meeting “as a complete disaster.” The meeting was well attended by Corps personnel in Washington DC and was video conference into Seattle and Portland offices. The DC personnel were very professional and polite as was the Portland office. I cannot say the same for the Seattle District who appeared to suffer from a complete lack of professionalism decorum and were nothing short of just plain rude. Colonel Lewis demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the issues and as a Vietnam Veteran, I personally believe she conducted herself in a manner most unbecoming of a military officer. Her 12 to 15 minute rant on Skagit County could best be described as nothing short of a little girl hissy fit and then she stormed out of the room not giving us the opportunity to comment on her misstatement of the facts at hand. She accused us among other things as treating the Corps like “a bunch of idiots” (something we never did nor have ever done) and then had the audacity to demean us for not giving her our presentation materials before hand because “she wasn’t sure she had the right people in the room to address our issues”. At that meeting she was accompanied by several Corps staff including the Corps hydrologist, the Skagit project manager, and the individual responsible for managing the dams during flood events. If those were not the “right people”, one has to ask who the right people are.

The Portland District seemed to get the message and asked me the only on point question concerning my presentation, that being: “Has anyone else seen the materials you presented?” I responded by saying that all of the supporting evidence to my presentation is displayed on my web site www.skagitriverhistory.com and that is exactly the reason I was in Washington DC as all of the federal agency people stationed in Washington State (USGS, the Corps and FEMA) seem to go out of their way to ignore the information. One of the things I found most upsetting about Colonel Lewis’s diatribe was that she stated HEC-2 Davis in California had looked at and analyzed all this information and had discounted it. HEC-2 Davis has never seen any of my presentation materials as the Seattle District never brought the validity of the Stewart figures to their attention. I would submit that it is pretty easy to have your hydrology (the Corps) approved by HEC-2 Davis when you don’t show them all the information they need to do a proper evaluation.

As stated the Washington DC Corps people were very attentive and extraordinarily professional but unfortunately gave no commitment to do anything at all.

MEETING WITH FEMA

I personally viewed this meeting as the most important meeting I was privileged to attend. So much so that on Monday I locked myself in my hotel room and prepared all day for the meeting on Tuesday for any possible question that I might receive. The reason this meeting was so important was that FEMA supposedly had an independent consultant look at and evaluate the Stewart concerns however when the report was

published it did not appear that had happened although we were promised through e-mails and telephone conversations that was going to happen.

The meeting was attended by the SRIP delegation, Commissioners Dahlstedt and Munks, FEMA Region X Director, Mitigation Division, Carl Cook, Bill Blanton and Allyson Lichtenfels from FEMA Washington DC headquarters and Andrea Ryon and Will Thomas from FEMA's private consulting firm, the Michael Baker Corporation. A legislative liaison from Representative Larsen's office was also in attendance. I gave my presentation on Stewart and was immediately followed by Chal Martin's presentation on the Skagit County hydrology.

Half way through Chal Martin's presentation, Carl Cook got up from the table and went to the back of the room and sat down next to the legislative liaison at which time he stated, "I don't see anything new here do you?" She replied, "No nothing at all." Mr. Cook replied, "Okay then we're not going to do anything."

To say that this was anything but disappointing to me would be the understatement of the year. Mr. Cook and I went back to the table. When Mr. Martin was done Mr. Thomas did express some seemingly legitimate concerns about the methodology used and the results of the Skagit County consultant hydrology. However, when Mr. Thomas and I discussed the Stewart presentation I stated to him that with all due respect to Mr. Thomas (who I hold in the highest esteem, although he is a former USGS 30 year employee and works for a company that receives multi-million dollar contracts from the Corps of Engineers, he is truly a gentleman and a professional) I felt that he had made the same mistake that FEMA, Corps and USGS hydrologist have made. That being that they all have assumed that Stewart got the intensity of the flood events in the right order. As I showed him, based on the evidence, that is highly questionable at best, and certainly not supported by any tangible reading of the documentation presented.

Mr. Thomas stated that he too had some concerns about the accuracy of the Stewart data based on the three floods (1897, 1909 and 1917) being determined at some point "approximately one mile upstream" and not being proven by anyone at any of the agencies, but did not analyze it in his report. When I asked him why after I was promised by FEMA Region X employees that he was to do exactly that he replied, "I was told not to." By whom I asked? He replied, "FEMA". I then asked him what it was going to take to get him to evaluate the Stewart data. He replied, "The man sitting next to you has to tell me to do that."

The man sitting next to me was Carl Cook, FEMA Region X. Based on what I had just heard him tell Representative Larson's legislative liaison I then turned to Mr. Cook and said, "And you're not going to tell him to do a damn thing are you?" To which Mr. Cook replied, "No." At this point I hope that I did not embarrass the County Commissioners too much because as far as I was concerned the meeting was over. I gathered up my things, went over to Mr. Thomas, shook his hand and thanked him for his time and left. I had just witnessed what my federal government does better than anyone else, absolutely nothing. When I think of the countless hours that have went into the

research, the vacation days taken in order to go to Washington DC or to attend local meetings on flood control, the public expense to send me to Washington DC not to mention the time away from my family and the pursuit of things normal people do for enjoyment it would be easy for me to be very bitter about this experience. Instead it has cemented my resolve to continue the fight to bring the truth to the people and force the agencies to become public servants instead of public masters. To work for positive political leadership to replace the void that currently exists. Subsequent to the meetings in DC, as within the last two weeks, some startling new information has come to light and will be made public next month when I republish the Stewart Whitepaper originally published on February 14, 2004 (See **James E. Stewart Skagit River Flood Reports And Assorted Documents: A Citizen Critical Review Whitepaper**).

Important at this point is to note that I do not own property in the Skagit River floodplain. I am a strict floodplain management advocate. I do not now nor have I ever been a promoter of the development of floodplains. I have often stated publicly that the only people who belong in floodplains are farmers or other open space uses. I am not a member of any development group or a company that stands to make money off of development. I have never been paid by anyone nor sought to be paid by anyone for the work that I have done. My sole motivation is the truth and the truth in the instant case is that the federal agencies involved with the Skagit River floodplain are using flawed data that results in Skagit County residents not being able to afford flood control and creates a situation wherein the residents of Skagit County and the American taxpayer are at risk to the tune of over a billion dollars. A risk I might add that if FEMA Region X had actually enforced the NFIP regulations they are suppose to enforce instead of just trying to sell insurance probably would not be in harms way.

To the people of Skagit County who paid for my trip to Washington DC, my sincere apologies for not being able to accomplish what I set out to do, but be advised, the fight is not over. If the government truly wanted to turn me into an “Angry Citizen” they accomplished that goal.

To end on a more pleasant note, on Saturday and Sunday of the DC trip, besides breakfast and dinner meetings, we had the rest of the day off. Mayor Tjeerdsma and I teamed up and became tourist. We had the distinct honor to visit the Washington Monument, Vietnam Memorial, the World War II and Korean Memorials, the Lincoln, Jefferson and Roosevelt Memorials, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, the flight museum and a museum devoted to ancient artifacts from around the world, some thousands of years old. That part of the DC trip was something that I will never forget. I think that if you had a month to spend in DC you couldn’t make it to everything. I am greatly indebted to Skagit County for the opportunity to visit our nation’s capital. Thank you.

Larry Kunzler

