

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
The Skagit River System
03/06/08

I have been dwelling on some thoughts that I would like to share. I feel this is of great significant on where as communities we need to move forward and be successful.

We can no longer look at flood control as a protection device. Levies do not protect communities. They REDUCE RISK. Thus we are not capable of protecting our public from the forces of the mighty Skagit River. One day he river will reclaim its flood plain. That is an undeniable fact. This is a risk we all take living in the Skagit Valley.

So we are unable to protect people and property. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? It is neither. It is just reality. We just need to look at what we are trying to accomplish in a different way.

We, for one need not look at the 1% -100 year flood level as the end all. To do so would give residence a complete since of false security. Don't get me wrong, there are significant ramifications to that mark. What I am saying is that if our goals are to REDUCE RISK we will need to take a different stance in the setting of those goals. Some areas in our communities the 1%-100 year level may not be enough to reduce the risk. Other parts it may seem that there is absolutely no need to reach that bench mark.

Let's take a couple of examples. Burlington Boulevard and I5 carries a very high value for the people of Skagit County. We rely on those avenues of transportation for our businesses, for jobs, and tax revenue. Would we want to limit the level of liability to a 1% -100 year event on that area or does it require something more?

On the other side we have the Avon and Sterling areas. These are predominately an open space area with low financial impact on the cities of Burlington, Mount Vernon or other surrounding areas. Would it make since to produce 1%-100 year RISK REDUCTION to this area?

In order for this to really hit home let me throw in a little factor called liability. Over the past week when I was at the Levy Safety Summit in St. Louis it was made perfectly clear to me that FEMA and The Corps of Engineers are running like hell from the liability side of FLOOD RISK REDUCTION. The Corps is busy decertifying levies as fast as they can. As they do this, FEMA is coming in behind them telling the community stake holders that it is their job to make the necessary changes and hire their own engineering companies, consultants and contractors to recertify these Levy systems. Financial assistance is nonexistent.

So do we want to continue to walk the path of flood protection which furthers our sense of false security or move in a new direction? We are now responsible and completely liable for the powers of the Skagit River. Does it not make sense that we begin to move towards FLOOD RISK REDUCTION?

Now that we have generally covered the issues of RISK and LIABILITY lets hit on actually putting together a project of any significance. As you know there is a Corps G.I. study that has been taking place over the past ten plus years. The project completion date is set for

sometime in 2014. While the G.I. study may produce a plan for comprehensive flood reduction, we should not hold ourselves hostage to that study.

You may ask why? Don't we need the G.I. Study in order to get federal funding for FLOOD RISK projects? The answer is no. Though the study is important for the Corps to move forward on project funding, it is not our only alternative.

There are two reasons I give for my reasoning. First the federal government does not have nearly enough funds available for "FLOOD RISK" projects or for that matter flood control projects. An example was brought to me from the Stain Louis area. The Corps of Engineers has decertified five local levy systems. This impacts 105,000 residents 50,000 jobs and \$15 billion dollars in assets that were within these 1%-100 year levies. These residents did not have to carry FEMA flood insurance or build above the 100 year mapping levels. They thought they were secure and "protected".

In order for these local entities to begin to move forward on project studies to be brought up to certification they calculated they would need \$17,791,000 in the 2009 fiscal year. Through the Corps and FEMA's efforts there is \$3,184,000 in federal funding available for 2009. This leaves communities who had thought they would be in the 1%-100 year flood risk areas holding the bag for \$14,607,000 for 2009 alone. Estimated total cost is not yet established but are thought to be in the hundreds of millions.

Let me remind you that this is not a RISK REDUCTION project. Those levies already met most of the 1%-100 year specifications. They simply need updating. The basic infrastructure is there. The Corp and FEMA need to cut their liability. The Federal Government has literally no funding for these types of projects. These communities are going to have to find alternative ways to fund the work they need done or take a huge financial hit.

Do you see where I am going with this? We have to design and build a reliable infrastructure. Skagit County has a lot of competition for a very small amount of FLOOD RISK funding. We as the community of Skagit County are going to have to work in a proactive ground breaking manner in order to reduce our FLOOD RISK. We need to design our own projects in order to reduce our liability with or without federal funding. We are going to have to come up with our own creative ways to produce funding. And last but not least we are going to have to work together. One man cannot stand alone in this journey. It is going to take a group effort for Skagit County to succeed. Ladies and gentlemen the odds are not in our favor. We have a mountain of hurdles to overcome. But we must do this for our public and I believe we can.

Daryl Hamburg