



March 31, 2009

Board of Skagit County Commissioners
1800 Continental Place, Suite 100
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Dear Commissioners,

The purpose of this letter is to request your support, as the Local Sponsor of the Skagit River General Investigation Study, to 1) convene a day-long technical meeting to narrow differences between the Seattle District, Corps of Engineers hydrology report and those of local agencies, (possibly resolving the differences), and 2) consider taking steps to engage the National Research Council to study and report on the hydrology issue if the local meeting does not resolve the differences.

A contingent representing the City of Burlington, Dike District 1, and Dike District 12 recently met with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (Project Planning and Review), Mr. Doug Lamont, along with members of the Headquarters U.S. Army Corps of Engineers staff regarding the possibility of engaging in an independent external review process for the hydrological analysis of the Skagit River General Investigation study. In this meeting, we expressed our concern that the hydrology was a basic foundational issue which must be resolved prior to further work on the General Investigation study. In particular, it is difficult to define existing conditions or determine appropriate flood measures if the underlying hydrologic basis is not correct.

As you know, recent reports completed by Northwest Hydraulic Consultants and Pacific International Engineering, based upon a hydraulic model extended upriver from the Dalles gage (84-year continuous record) to the Concrete vicinity, convincingly demonstrate the historic flood estimates used in the current Corps flood frequency analysis are overstated. Further, the two independently developed hydraulic models in the new reports are returning basically the same results. The primary difference in the estimates of the historic floods between these new reports are due to the stage selected for the 1921 flood: Northwest Hydraulic Consultants used a newspaper account of the time, and Pacific International Engineering used survey information contained in James E. Stewart's (a USGS Hydraulic Engineer) notes from his 1922 study of the Skagit system.

The Assistant Secretary recognized an impasse had been reached regarding this technical issue, and agreed that an independent external peer review was the appropriate next step to resolve the issue. Further, Mr. Lamont also indicated the issue needed to be resolved now,

not at the end of the General Investigation study. He was willing to engage in an independent external review, but before that process is initiated, agreed to request the Seattle District invest a day to meet with interested parties from Burlington and Skagit County to give the technical information one final look. The purpose of this meeting would be to narrow the differences in the hydrology if possible, and if agreement is not reached, define those areas of disagreement so that a subsequent external independent technical review would be focused and efficient. We request your support in helping to schedule this meeting.

The City and Dike Districts also met with Dr. Steve Parker and Jeffrey Jacobs of the National Research Council. Dr. Parker believed the NRC could provide an independent technical review of the hydrology and estimated the effort might cost \$400,000 - \$500,000. Dr. Parker proposed that if the NRC were to be engaged for this independent review, the NRC could work through an agreement with Corps Headquarters in Washington D.C. or the Corps Division offices in Portland. We discussed the process for an independent review. Dr. Parker assured us that all parties would have an equal opportunity to present their technical information and respond to all facets of the technical discussion. He said the NRC has an open and public process which enables all information to be presented in a public forum. Burlington, Dike 1 and Dike 12 preliminarily support this approach, if the hydrology issue cannot be resolved at the Seattle District level.

Although this independent technical review would be expensive up front, we believe it may be a good investment because it has the potential to put the hydrology issue behind us, enable full community support for the GI study, end the financial uncertainty associated with a possible FEMA flood map appeal process, and shift the flood focus toward building projects rather than arguing about the baseline conditions. We request Skagit County consider the possibility of an independent hydrology review through the National Academies, should the issue not be resolved locally with the Seattle District.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Brunz
Mayor

cc: Mayor Bud Norris, City of Mount Vernon
Mayor Mike Anderson, City of Sedro-Woolley
Mayor Ramon Hayes, Town of La Conner
Mayor Tim Bates, Town of Hamilton
Mayor Debra Heinzman, Town of Lyman
Mayor Judd Wilson, Town of Concrete
Dike Districts 22, 1, 3, 12, 17, 20, 25
Drainage Districts 18, 5, 16, 25, 14, 20, 21, 12, 19, 15, 17, 22