

(Draft from 6/2/09 DDTC Meeting)

Dike and Drainage Technical Committee offers the following comments on the potential local project, "Emergency Overflow Spillway":

The use of a spillway(s) as a flood control measure has numerous challenges. They include:

1. Dike and drainage districts are generally in the business of keeping or moving water out of their respective districts. Designing a measure that directs water onto private property through a "spillway" flies in the face of this general mandate and is contrary to the required nexus between district taxes benefiting the lands being assessed. This raises concern about "liabilities". What is the liability of a spillway within a dike district? Does deliberate flow of water on tax payers land create a conflict? Who takes on the liability of such an act?
2. What to do with the water once it leaves the river? It is unlikely there would be many property owners volunteering to take flood waters for the good of the whole. A flood flowage easement or outright purchase of the flowage pathway would be necessary. This will likely be expensive and contentious. What is the cost incurred by spillways? The cost to construct, buy easements, maintenance and drainage? What would it be in comparison to overtopping 30 or 50 year levies?
Water leaving the river will have a major impact on drainage districts, especially districts #15, #12, #19 and #22 (depending on the selected flowage pathway(s). Once the water leaves the river it becomes an interior drainage problem requiring improvements to both drainage infrastructure capacities and ability to outlet to the saltwater bays. This would need to be put in place before the spillway is built. Would spillways be better served to remove water from the flood plain instead of putting water on the flood plain?
3. Non-mechanical overtopping of levees is preferred. Flooding is then seen as an "act of God" rather than a man directed event (again from a liability standpoint). Would overtopping levies with an element of flood risk management be easier for the public to support? People are still going to get wet during a major event but are getting risk reduction based on the percentage of likelihood the major event will happen in a given year.

The DDTC believes that a spillway would be an appropriate outlet to get water (once it has left the river) out to the saltwater. This would have application for the Samish River as well as any overflow areas of the Skagit (e.g., "sea gates" on Fir Island).