

## **Skagit County PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN FOR THE SKAGIT RIVER COMPREHENSIVE FLOOD HAZARD MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**October 19, 2008**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

As Skagit County, through the formation of an Advisory Committee and three Technical Committees, starts a Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan (CFHMP), consideration of the role of the public in the process and the need for public involvement in helping shape the plan becomes a critical part of the process. While the County Commissioner resolution forming the Committees includes the need for the Committee members to keep their constituents informed and involved in the process, for the planning process to succeed and meet the expectations of the Skagit County residents and businesses, the public needs the ability to become informed and participate in providing input and ideas for the process.

Past flood events in the Skagit Basin have shown how the community can be negatively impacted by flood events. While flood events most directly affect property owners in the floodplain, any significant event can impact the economic health and welfare of all of Skagit County, as well as regional and national interests. A key component of the CFHMP is to inform Skagit County citizens and businesses about the life-safety and health, welfare, property, and infrastructure components of flooding in Skagit County, and at the same time allow for citizens and businesses to become actively involved in providing input into how such events can be better controlled and risks reduced.

Skagit County has a well established public participation and communication program that has been effective in communicating news about flood projects, flood preparedness and County activities regarding flood hazard management. The Public Involvement Plan for the CFHMP will build off this already-established program, seeking to incorporate more active involvement from Advisory Committee and Technical Committee members. This involvement will enable more extensive outreach, particularly in the form of community presentations and open-house meetings that will raise the level of understanding about flood risks and problems among County residents, both in and outside the Skagit River floodplain.

The CFHMP initial interviews conducted by the consultant team included the following questions related to involving the public:

- How informed do you believe the general public is in relation to flood concerns here in Skagit County?
- Do you have any thoughts on how it would be best to communicate with the public at large throughout this process so that the public is kept informed and involved?

Some of the responses from the interview to these two questions include:

- Residents outside flood-prone areas are less aware of flood issues

- The public could have a false sense of security about flood concerns because significant flooding hasn't happened for several years and because of a sense of safety from existing flood protection infrastructure
- The public will want simple, direct information, but the problems are complex and interconnected
- If public doesn't understand, it will default to NO
- There is a need for much more outreach
- Public involvement and information will tie to public funding support
- Create a graphic of what a 100-year flood looks like at various locations in the floodplain
- Use clear terminology and language and define terms.

The development of this Public Involvement Plan relied on the interview input, especially for the Public Involvement Plan goals, objectives, and key messages.

This Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is intended to provide an approach and specific information to guide public education and input throughout the CFHMP process. As such, the plan is not a static document but rather intended as a dynamic document that will be modified and changed as needed to meet existing conditions as they develop.

While many participants may be involved in implementing this Public Involvement Plan, it is the intention that public efforts and input be a focus of the Advisory Committee.

It is anticipated that the Advisory Committee will approve this document and then consider the steps identified for public involvement as they go about their efforts directing the CFHMP process.

## **BACKGROUND**

Skagit County residents have a long history of public involvement on flood damage issues dating back more than 100 years. Initially levees and dikes were constructed to reclaim productive farmland and protect it from tides and floods. As cities and towns grew and expanded in the flood plain, flood control became more critical to protect homes, businesses, and public infrastructure.

In recent years Skagit County and other local jurisdictions have expended resources for ongoing outreach and education on flood issues and public safety. This effort will be integrated with ongoing efforts to improve public participation and knowledge on flood issues.

## **GOAL OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN**

The goal of the public participation plan is to inform interested citizens about the project and to provide opportunities for meaningful involvement in the CFHMP process so that the public can actively participate in shaping a successful outcome.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN OBJECTIVES**

- Create public awareness about the project -- its purpose, process, and schedule -- and promote active public participation in it

- Offer and inform the public of their opportunities for providing meaningful input and for participating in the identification of problems and development and evaluation of alternatives, leading to a preferred alternative. Include obtaining public input on the selection of approaches for reducing flood risks such as providing additional storage, creating improved conveyance approaches, and using non-structural approaches
- Provide a planned, coordinated approach to dealing with public issues
- Ensure that the study process is open, fair and responsive to public needs and concerns
- Provide the public with consistent, clear, and accurate information needed to understand the project (No surprises)
- Provide for two-way communication throughout the project
- Communicate the benefits of the project for the community and region
- Explain the project phases and schedule
- Allow for various levels of public involvement depending on the needs and varying interests of the different stakeholders

## **KEY MESSAGES**

- Flooding in the Skagit Valley has had and will have in the future impacts on all citizens, businesses, industries, and agencies regardless of whether or not they are in the floodplain
- Flood reduction efforts need to focus on risk reduction versus flood prevention
- There have been and continue to be many efforts in the Skagit Valley aimed at reducing flood risks
- The CFHMP is intended to consolidate and coordinate the many flood risk reduction efforts
- There are only certain approaches available to reduce flood risks: storage of flood waters; conveyance of flood waters through the area; and/or provide incentives, regulatory, or other “non-structural” mechanisms that indirectly reduce the risks of flooding
- Flood efforts need to consider environmental and salmon improvements
- In order to succeed, the Skagit Valley needs to work together and cooperatively

## **TARGET AUDIENCES**

To implement an effective Public Involvement Plan, there is a need to address a wide range of entities, groups, and individuals that have a vested interest in the outcome of the Skagit County Flood Hazard Management Plan. Below are the general categories of audiences for focused involvement efforts (See Appendix A for specific target audiences):

- CFHMP Committees and the Board of Supervisors
- Governments/Quasi Government Interests
- Environmental Interests
- Agricultural Interests
- Business Interests

- General Public and Miscellaneous Interests

For the Skagit River CFHMP, the following categories of activities are recommended:

- Disseminate information about Flood Control Zone District (FCZD) activities and routine business
- Media releases
- Community presentations
- Community events

Specific activities related to each of these categories are summarized in Table 1. For each activity, a lead and support role is identified. In many cases, the support role may include a very active role in the activity, such as developing news articles, speaking in a radio spot, or delivering a city council briefing via a presentation developed by the activity lead. A schedule is also provided for each activity, laying forth the frequency and number of each activity that is recommended. Detailed descriptions of each action are provided in the following section.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**

### **Computer- and Internet-Based Activities**

- **Skagit County CFHMP Project Website:** CFHMP project website will be maintained so that it is a reliable source of information about progress on the CFHMP. This will include the mission, guiding principals, and structure of the Skagit County Flood Control Zone District. Our website will identify our committee members and their affiliation. Meeting agendas, meeting summaries, work products and technical resource documents will be posted to the website. Audio recordings of the meetings will also be downloadable.
- **Skagit County List Serve:** This email mailing list is maintained by Skagit County for the purpose of distributing periodic information to those interested in receiving such County updates. Anyone can sign up for the Skagit County List Serve. This communication too has not been used frequently in the past, but could be used to provide members of the public to subscribe to receive updates from the Flood Control Zone District.
- **www.goskagit.com:** Use ads on Skagit Valley Herald website to direct readers to the project website.
- **Archive public presentations and workshops on Skagit 21:** Provide public viewing via video streaming on Skagit 21's video archive available on the Skagit County website.

### **Newsletters**

- **Skagit County Newsletters Dedicated to Flooding and Flood Hazard Management:** In addition to the general topic quarterly newsletters described above, four newsletters dedicated to flooding and flood hazard management are currently programmed. These reports are typically delivered as newspaper inserts. The first dedicated newsletter, produced in July, 2008, focused on the FCZD Advisory and Technical Committees, the CFHMP project kickoff on June 9, effects of Skagit River flooding, and the recent FEMA CRS upgrade to a "4" rating.



- **Key Communicator Letters:** Skagit County will maintain a mailing list of individuals who have expressed interest in receiving information about previous projects. This list includes elected officials of local governments within Skagit County. At significant milestones, such as when draft alternatives have been selected and when the draft CFHMP is available, letters will be sent to everyone on this mailing list to update them and solicit input. Interested residents can be added to the mailing list at their request; the CFHMP website will include a way for users to make this request via the website.

**TABLE 1.  
SUMMARY OF SKAGIT RIVER CFHMP UPDATE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**

Action	Lead/Support	Target Audience	Schedule
<b>Computer and Internet-Based Activities</b>			
CFHMP Project Website.	Skagit County	All	As needed, but at least monthly
Skagit County List Serve	Skagit County	All (must subscribe)	Monthly updates
Utilize ad space on www.goskagit.com, the Skagit Valley Herald website	Skagit County	All	Set up at beginning of project
<b>Newsletters</b>			
Skagit County newsletters dedicated to flood issues (newspaper insert)	Skagit County/AC members	All within media market	Quarterly
Key Communicator Letters – delivered through U.S. Postal Service	Skagit County	Residents on mailing list	Milestones:
Around Skagit County—the internal County newsletter	Skagit County	Skagit County employees	Quarterly
Utility bill insert	Skagit County	All	Twice/year
<b>Media Releases</b>			
Skagit 21 Government Access Television—broadcast key meetings, workshops, and County Commissioner work sessions	Skagit County	All	Key meetings to be identified by FCZD Advisory Committee, Board of Supervisors and/or Skagit County staff
Weekly radio spot on KBRC radio station	Skagit County/AC members	All within media market	Monthly
News releases to local media	Skagit County	All within media market	At milestones
Series of newspaper articles	Skagit County/AC & TC members	All within media market	As arranged with newspaper
Editorial Board briefings	Advisory Committee	Skagit County employees	Quarterly
<b>Community Presentations</b>			
“Speakers Bureau” presentations	AC and TC members	Study area residents	Minimum of 50 presentations
Briefings to City and Town Councils	AC and TC members	Local elected officials	Quarterly
County Commissioner work sessions	Skagit County/AC	Local elected officials, wider audience if televised	Quarterly

<b>TABLE 1 (continued). SUMMARY OF SKAGIT RIVER CFHMP UPDATE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Action	Lead/Support	Target Audience	Schedule
<b>Community Events</b>			
Flood Awareness Week	Skagit County	All residents	Annually in October
Booth at the Fair	Skagit County/AC & TC	All residents	Annually in August
Public Workshops on CFHMP update	AC/TC	All residents and stakeholders	At milestones
<b>Other Tools</b>			
Flood Hotline – add info about CFHMP project	Skagit County	All residents	Throughout flood season
Information kiosks	Skagit County/AC & TC	All residents and stakeholders	ongoing
Information sheets at gathering places	Skagit County/AC & TC	All residents and stakeholders	ongoing

- **Around Skagit County:** Update Skagit County employees through monthly internal newsletter.
- **Bill insert:** Provide information about the CFHMP project as an insert with utility bills – PSE or PUD. This is just one more way to get information into peoples homes, and is usually pretty inexpensive.

## Media

- **Skagit 21 Government Access Television:** Skagit County will broadcast selected Advisory Committee Meetings, produce informational reports, and record Skagit County Commissioners work sessions. We have the ability to video stream all material and make it available online on demand.
- **News Releases:** All significant actions of the Flood Control Zone District will be reported via news release to the local media and to Skagit County list serves. Distribution includes the Skagit Valley Herald, Argus, Anacortes American, Courier Times, La Conner Weekly, KBRC, KAPS, KWALE, and other regional media.
- **Radio News Reports:** We have access to a local radio report on KBRC each Thursday. We will utilize this time to give regular reports on the Flood Control Zone District.
- **Series of Newspaper Articles:** If the Skagit Valley Herald is open to this, these could be developed as an informative series that explores different facets of flooding and flood impacts, as well as how to solve the problems. The “voices of the valley” feature could be one approach for this. They could also be letters to the editor, but ideally would come through the FCZD Advisory Committee, even if authored by individuals.

- **Editorial Board Briefings:** Another way of getting coverage in the newspaper. This could be especially effective if briefing done by Commissioners/Mayors.

## Presentations

- **Speakers Bureau:** During the course of two years we should establish a goal of making 50 presentations to non-profit groups, service clubs, senior centers and community organizations. May of these could be informal “coffees” in neighborhoods. Outreach to schools is especially encouraged.
- **Work Sessions to County Commissioners:** Periodic county commissioner work sessions will focus on CFHMP progress. If requested by the Advisory Committee, these sessions can be televised on Skagit 21 Government Access Television.
- **Presentations to City and Town Councils:** Advisory and Technical representatives will be encouraged to provide regular briefings to their councils regarding FCZD activities and progress on the CFHMP. Ideally, generic presentation materials will be developed by consultants or Skagit County, so these briefings will deliver a consistent throughout the watershed.

## Community Events

- **Public Open House Meetings:** Two sets of three open house meetings, distributed throughout the watershed —potentially in Hamilton, Mt. Vernon, and Anacortes or La Conner. One set would be held when draft alternatives are identified, and the second set when a draft CFHMP is available.
- **Flood Awareness Week Activities:** Flood Control Zone District information will be incorporated into all our media actions during Flood Awareness Week in October including 8-page Community Report to all Skagit County residents, brochure mailer to residents in the flood plain, television and radio reports, Commissioners Work Sessions, PIO meeting, and Community Breakfast.
- **Booth at the Skagit County Fair:** Informational booth at the fair will raise awareness about flood issues and what is being done to solve them.

## Other Tools

- **Telephone Hot Line:** Although the flood hotline is only active during flood season, adding information (phone number and web site) about the CFHMP project would allow interested residents to easily access information about what’s being done to solve the flooding problem in the long term. Quite a few people, especially senior citizens, are more likely to seek information through their telephone than a computer.
- **Information Centers:** Kiosks in malls, transit stations, etc. Posters for churches, community halls, etc.
- **Informational material (FAQ, project sheets, maps, etc.):** Have available at County/City offices, libraries, other community gathering places. Also post on project website.

## EVALUATION—CHANGES

- Monitor and track all media coverage, editorials, and letters to the editor about the project.





- Track written, verbal and e-mailed comments, questions, praise and criticisms received during project.
- Track attendance at presentations and comments received.
- Track number of page views the project Web page receives during key periods.

Conduct post-project stakeholder interviews and/or an online public opinion poll on how we handled various. Use the information received to develop and construct future projects.

## **APPENDIX A. TARGET AUDIENCES**

To conduct an effective Public Involvement Plan, there is a need to address a wide range of entities, groups, and individuals that have a vested interest in the outcome of the Skagit County Flood Hazard Management Plan. Below are the specific audiences for focused involvement efforts:

### **CFHMP COMMITTEES AND THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

- Skagit County Commissioners (Board of Supervisors)
- Advisory Committee (15-members)
- Technical Committees (Land Use, Environmental, and Dike and Drainage)

### **GOVERNMENTS/QUASI GOVERNMENT INTERESTS**

- Cities
- Towns
- Tribes (Swinomish, Upper Skagit, Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, and Skagit River System Cooperative)
- Skagit County
- Dike and Drainage Districts
- Port Districts
- School Districts
- Skagit Transit
- Skagit County Public Utility District #1
- Skagit County Search and Rescue
- Department of Emergency Management
- Emergency Responders
- Puget Sound Partnership
- State Agencies
  - WSDOT
  - Ecology
  - CTED
  - DNR
  - National Guard

- Federal
  - Forest Service
  - FERC
  - FEMA
  - Army Corps
- Seattle City Light
- Skagit County Housing Authority
- Skagit County Community Action Agency
- Puget Sound Power Co.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL INTERESTS**

- Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
- Friends of Skagit County
- Skagit Land Trust
- Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group
- Skagit Watershed Council
- Land Conservancy

### **AGRICULTURAL INTERESTS**

- Skagit Conservation District
- Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
- Skagit County Farm Bureau
- Skagit Cattlemen's Association

### **BUSINESS INTERESTS**

- Chambers of Commerce
- Economic Development Association of Skagit County
- Homebuilders Groups
- Real Estate Groups

### **GENERAL PUBLIC AND MISCELLANEOUS INTERESTS**

- Service Clubs
- Churches
- Skagit Valley College
- Skagit Valley Hospital
- United General Hospital



- Island Hospital
- Non-profit organizations

**APPENDIX B.  
(IF NEEDED)**