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# Skagit Valley Herald

## Flood control

### Samish basin residents want more protection

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ALLEN – As thousands of residents in Minnesota, Mississippi and Texas battle spilling flood waters and breaking dikes, residents of the Samish basin met with county and federal officials to discuss their own flood protection.

At the Midway House in Bow last night, residents told officials from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers they want more protection than would be provided by the favored flood control proposal.

The plan that seems to provide the most protection to the most people in Skagit County appears to be alternative 3E, a \$55 million project, said corps project manager Vernon Cook.

Diagrams for this alternative show a ring dike around north Burlington and a weir structure between Burlington and Sedro-Woolley.

This weir structure would allow flood waters greater than the 50-year-level into the Samish River drainage area, which does not sit well with residents of that area.

Until about a 20-year-flood, the Samish area would experience no change under this alternative. Any flood greater than this level would begin to top the weir, increasing with severity. But the flooding would be slower and less damaging than at present, Cook said.

But those at the meeting indicated they preferred alternative 3C, which would run a solid dike between Burlington and Sedro-Woolley rather than a weir, and provide 100-year protection to the Samish area.

They are uneasy about the weir and the idea of a planned flood, making them absorb flood waters for the rest of the county.

But the cost of alternative 3C is estimated at \$93 million, giving it a negative benefit-cost ration. This would lessen its chances of authorization by Congress.

Some concern was expressed about the likelihood of development on farmlands if flood protection is increased.

“In protecting the farm land, there’s a chance we’re going to lose it,” one man said.

County Commissioner Bud Norris said the commissioners would attempt to protect agricultural lands, but acknowledged “this board isn’t going to be around forever.”

“We’d be kidding ourselves if we didn’t think pressure would be extremely great (for development) once it gets protection,” he said.

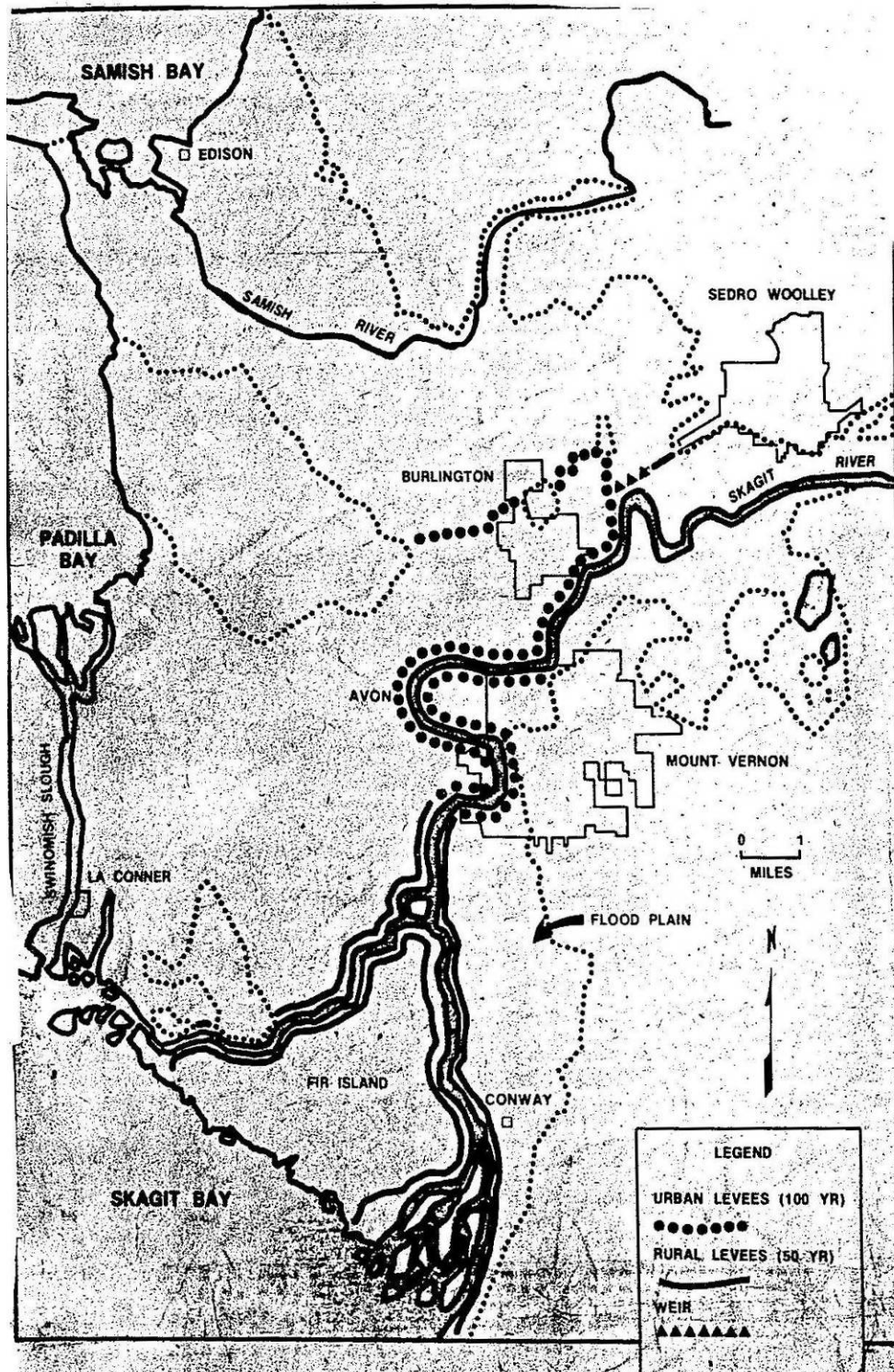
Most present, however, seemed to think a levee improvement project would be better than no action.

“As long as I’ve lived in Skagit County, I’ve known we’re living on borrowed time,” Bob Hulbert of the Soil Conservation District said. “I’ve realized for some time that the Skagit River system doesn’t have the capacity to prevent large scale floods. That was brought home in 1975.”

Cook reminded the group that no decision has been made on any particular alternative, and added some changes probably would be made before one is chosen.

Commissioner Norris and corps officials last week met with residents of the Clear Lake-Nookachamps area, who also are concerned about the effect of the proposed project on their lands.

Those areas would be adversely impacted by the project in the event of flooding greater than the 50-year level.



**PROPOSED LEVEE IMPROVEMENTS** — Comments on the environmental impact statement for the proposed Skagit River flood project will be accepted until June 15. The recently-released document notes that some adverse impacts of the project are induced flooding in some unleveed areas and pressure to develop

farm lands receiving increased flood protection. Other impacts would generally be short-term, resulting from construction work, the document says. The proposed project would provide 100-year flood protection to urban areas of Mount Vernon and Burlington, and 50-year protection to rural areas.