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824.02(Skagit River)15

24 January 1951

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Honorable Henry M. Jackson
House of Representatives
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Jackson:

At your request a conference was held on 9 January 1951 between representatives of this office and Mr. R. W. Kates, Secretary, Skagit County Farm Bureau, to discuss the points raised in his letter to you of 26 December 1950 regarding flood control and drainage of Skagit River. Answers to items 3 and 4 of his letter were given to Mr. Kates at the meeting, and additional information was given by him regarding items 1 and 2. Discussion of each of the items follows.

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Item 1 requested removal of dams at the heads of Deep Slough and Clear Slough.

Item 2 requested enlarging of the opening in the training dike at the mouth of the South Fork.

It was brought out at the conference that the two requested actions had a common objective: to lower the water surface at the mouth of the South Fork during low tide to facilitate drainage of the lands embraced in Drainage District No. 3. As you may recall, the River and Harbor Act of June 25, 1910, authorized a project for improvement of Skagit River to provide, among other works, for construction of a dike at the mouth of the South Fork and for closure of subsidiary channels. Construction of the training dike and closing dikes was completed in 1911. As a result of the natural river action, the North Fork later became the best navigable channel and all river traffic utilized that channel. Consequently, but little maintenance work was done on the training and closing dikes, and they became badly deteriorated.

About 1938, Drainage District No. 3, which includes all the valley south of Mount Vernon and east of the South Fork, improved its drainage facilities by construction of a main ditch discharging through tide gates into the South Fork at its mouth, and with a pumping plant at Conway. The full history of that ditch is not known to this office.

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but it appears that, because of the deterioration of the South Fork navigation works, river stages at low tide were low enough to permit the ditch to operate by gravity without auxiliary pumping.

During recent years navigation, in the form of log towing, again became active on the South Fork, and the Corps of Engineers was requested by the towboat operators to restore the navigation project. An investigation by this office revealed that partial restoration of the project would increase navigable depths at the mouth of the South Fork by about 1 foot at low tide, and thus permit navigation over a large portion of the tidal cycle. Accordingly, maintenance dredging was done in October 1950 and the spoil material used to fill gaps in the training dike. The dike, as originally constructed and as now reconstructed, has a top elevation of 3 feet above mean sea level, and is intended to increase depths in the channel at low water only. At tide stages of higher than 3 feet above mean sea level the dike is overtopped and becomes ineffective.

Although the restoration of the training dike does not affect the river level at higher tide stages and therefore does not affect the flood problem in the South Fork area, it is possible that the rise of 1 foot at low tide may be sufficient to reduce the efficiency of the drainage ditch and so require reactivation of the pumping plant at Conway. Inspection of the ditch following the meeting on 9 January 1951 showed the water surface to be 3 to 4 feet below the fields, and no significant amount of standing water in the fields.

In view of the use of the South Fork for navigation and of the congressional directive for improvement of the channel in the interest of navigation, I am of the opinion that conditions now prevailing at the outlet of the drainage ditch will prevail for the foreseeable future, and that this office is not in position to provide openings in the existing training dike, as requested by Mr. Kaeas.

Item 3 of Mr. Kaeas's letter relates to completion of the Mill Town Levee in Diking District No. 16. It was explained to Mr. Kaeas at the meeting of 9 January that a contract for completion of the levee would be awarded by this office in the near future. Bids for the completion have now been received and award of the contract is expected to be made in a very few days.

Item 4 of the letter is concerned with an overall plan for flood control of Skagit Valley. As you know, the Seattle District has been engaged for many months in a comprehensive study of the Skagit River in an attempt to provide an economical plan for flood control. Because of the very large measure of flood control afforded by the existing

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levees and to be afforded by storage in Ross Reservoir, additional works can be justified only by the small incremental benefits derived from elimination of damages from the rare higher floods. Our studies have shown that no additional works can be justified, with the possible exception of development of the Faber Reservoir site. Additional studies are now under way on that site, but it must be kept in mind that development of the site is strongly opposed by fisheries interests and that a very substantial flood-control and power benefit will have to be shown to over-ride the opposition. Upon completion of the current studies of the Faber site you will be informed of the outcome.

I trust that the above explanation will meet your needs for the present. If any further information or explanation is desired I shall be very happy to furnish it.

I am returning your letter from Mr. Kaess herewith.

Hopkins
Sincerely yours,

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