

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC HEARING ON FLOOD CONTROL FOR THE SKAGIT RIVER BASIN, 8 FEBRUARY 1961

A public hearing was held in Mount Vernon, Washington on 8 February 1961. The purpose of this hearing was to obtain the views of interested parties on methods of providing flood protection and allied improvements for the Skagit River Basin. There were about 154 persons in attendance, including interested federal, state and local agencies, landowners, businessmen, sportsmen, and farmers. Oral testimony was presented by 27 persons and 30 written statements were received.

In the opening statement Colonel R. P. Young, Seattle District Engineer, referred to authorizing resolutions by the United States Senate and House of Representatives which directed the Corps of Engineers to review the report of the Chief of Engineers on the Skagit River, House Document No. 187, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, to determine whether any modifications of the recommendations made in the report are desirable with respect to flood control and allied improvements in the basin. Colonel Young explained that the Corps of Engineers was particularly interested in securing information on the nature and scope of flood control problems and the improvements desired.

Potential flood damages were the subject of several prepared statements presented orally or submitted as exhibits for the record. Values quoted in all instances were in relation to a flood of magnitude equal to that which occurred in 1951 or greater.

Mr. Anton Harms, representing the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, estimated that the land damage as a result of the 1951 flood was about \$818,000. He also indicated that a greater flood would have put portions of the croplands out of production as long as five years because of resulting breaches of salt water dikes.

Mr. Harvey Benson, Public Utility Commissioner of Skagit County, and Mr. Archie French, City Manager, City of Anacortes, stated that a flood overtopping levees in the Burlington-Mount Vernon vicinity would probably result in complete disruption of the water distribution systems for the entire western portion of Skagit County, which in turn would force closing down of the major industries in the area.

Mr. Herman Hanson, Superintendent of Public Works for the City of Mount Vernon, submitted exhibit 22, which outlined probable damages for that city in the event of major flooding. Values listed included property damage of \$3,600,000, loss of business of \$2,400,000, and crash program city costs of \$200,000.

Mr. Frank Screws, City Supervisor, City of Burlington, submitted exhibit 23, which outlined existing facilities which could be seriously affected in the event of levees overtopping and flooding Burlington. Some of the more outstanding values are: private real property \$10,500,000; municipal real property \$225,000; sewer systems \$518,000; and personal property \$1,700,000.

Mr. Roy F. Magnuson, representing the Washington State Highway Department, outlined some expenses incurred in bringing existing roads up to a sufficient elevation to withstand small floods.

Other groups and associations which presented data on potential flood damages

included: The Skagit County Dairymen's Association; the Skagit County Agricultural Council; the Skagit County Strawberry Association; the public school systems and several diking and drainage districts.

The principal methods desired for preventing flood damages discussed at the hearing, were by storage reservoirs, levee improvements, river diversion and channel dredging.

a. Storage. Potential storage sites discussed included Faber and Copper Creek on the main stem, lower Sauk, upper Sauk, Suiattle and White Chuck Rivers tributary to the Sauk River; the Cascade on the Cascade River; and other headwater sites. The Washington State Departments of Game and Fisheries opposed the development of upstream storage as a means of flood prevention, with the exception of possibly some headwater sites. This opposition was based on the grounds that development of storage sites would adversely effect rearing and spawning areas for anadromous fish. Development of the Faber Dam site, located near Concrete, Washington, was opposed by the State Departments of Fisheries and Game; the Concrete Herald and other residents of the area. Little support was offered for potential storage sites.

b. Levee improvement. Levee improvement in the delta area with no major increases in existing heights was favored by the State Department of Game, the Skagit County Engineer, and representatives of several diking districts. The possibility of substantially increasing existing levee heights was opposed by the County Engineer and representatives of diking district No. 3 because of the hazard of seepage and blowout conditions through porous foundation materials.

c. Diversion. The authorized Avon Bypass to divert a portion of Skagit River flood water to Padilla Bay was favored by the Washington State Departments of Game and Fisheries and the Skagit County Engineer. The Bypass project was favored by the Departments of Game and Fisheries because it would have no effect on the existing Skagit River fishery resources. There was no opposition to the Avon Bypass expressed at this hearing.

d. Dredging. Widening and deepening of the Skagit River by dredging was favored by the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce as a method for flood control. Drainage District No. 17 favored flood control by deepening the South Fork of the Skagit River channel. Much of the support by these interests was on the basis that dredging for flood control would also provide navigation for transport of minerals and lumber products from the upper basin area to the Puget Sound. The Washington State Department of Game opposed dredging in the reach upstream from Mount Vernon on the grounds of adverse effects on spawning and rearing areas for game and anadromous fish. The Game Department did not express any opposition to dredging of the Skagit River downstream from Mount Vernon.

e. Miscellaneous. Other desired improvements for flood control in the lower Skagit River delta included increasing the flood flow area by relocation of the dike on Freshwater Slough, removal of an old Corps of Engineers navigation dam on Freshwater Slough, and removal of brush from the banks of the South Fork, Tom Moore Slough and Freshwater Slough.