

21 October 1963

Honorable Jack Westland
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Westland:

Please refer to your letter which inclosed correspondence from Mrs. Don Mapes, Burlington, Washington, concerning the proposed Avon Bypass Project, Skagit River, Washington. Mrs. Mapes calls attention to interests opposing the project, primarily in the Burlington area.

In 1959, high water flows on the Skagit River led to requests by local interest groups to their Congressional representatives for a study by the Corps of Engineers of flood control and other water resource needs in the Skagit River basin. The study was initiated in 1961. At a public hearing in February 1961, testimony was presented by representatives of diking districts, by the County, by Chamber of Commerce representatives, by municipalities, by representatives of agriculture and by many others. This testimony was overwhelmingly in favor of development of higher standards of flood control in the Skagit River. Our studies to date have confirmed that flood control measures are urgently needed in the Skagit River valley. Accordingly, we are preparing interim reports in order to expedite provision of those flood control improvements found to be justified.

The greatest part of the developed portion of Skagit County lies in the broad fertile flood plain of Skagit River from Sedro Woolley to the mouth. Approximately 68,000 acres of intensively farmed, high yield agricultural lands and the municipalities of Burlington, Avon and Mt. Vernon are partially protected by about 40 miles of levees along this portion of Skagit River. This levee system extends along both banks of the North and South Forks and along both banks of Skagit River to 4 miles above Mt. Vernon and on the right bank to 3 miles below Sedro Woolley. The levee system affords a relatively low degree of flood protection with capacities of leveed sections of river ranging generally from 91,000 to 123,000 cubic feet per second as compared with a maximum flood of record in 1909 of 220,000 cubic feet per second.

Careful consideration is being given to all possible means of providing flood control in the Skagit River basin including substantial raising of the

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existing levees, dredging the river to increase its capacity, constructing the Avon Bypass or an equivalent diversion channel, and providing upstream storage. Our studies to date indicate that raising the levees in any substantial amount does not appear to be feasible because the fine grained sandy-silty soils on which the levees are founded would permit excessive seepage causing sand boils and blowouts in the leveed areas. Dredging of the river for a flood control channel not only would undermine existing levees, but would be infeasible to maintain. It appears that upstream storage would be beneficial in any plan, but its feasibility depends on evaluation of many other long range water resource needs such as low flow augmentation for water supply, fisheries, hydro-power development, and other purposes. Our studies indicate that a single-purpose flood control storage dam cannot be justified; also, the upstream storage that would be available for flood control in a multi-purpose storage dam, by itself, would be insufficient to provide an adequate degree of flood protection for the Skagit River Valley.

In view of the above, further consideration is being given to a plan of flood protection for the valley consisting of the following three elements:

- a. Construct Avon Bypass diversion channel and improve and extend 4 miles of levee from the head end of the bypass upstream.
- b. Make the protection of existing levee system uniform by minor raising of those levees which are low, and strengthen the weak sections of the levees.
- c. Provide upstream storage in the future as it becomes feasible.

The foregoing items, a and b, would permit control of flood flows of at least 180,000 cubic feet per second and would increase the degree of flood protection in the valley. On a long range basis, item c - upstream storage could further increase the degree of flood protection. The District Engineer, Seattle, is taking steps to report on items a and b in the near future. There has been broad public support of the Avon Bypass Project by the County Commissioners and by the business and agricultural community. The principal objections appear to stem from land owners along the right-of-way of the bypass channel. Other routes have been studied and the most feasible alternative was found to cost over \$2,000,000 more than the proposed route. The high cost of the alternative alignment is due principally to the higher cost of the lands which are much more highly developed along the alternative route; also, widening of the river would be required from Avon to the Great Northern Railway bridge crossing upstream to achieve the same degree of protection as the proposed alignment.

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We have not encountered any outstanding opposition to the plan in the Burlington area from either civic or business leaders, except on an isolated basis. The bypass plan will result in lowering of the flood flow water surface in the vicinity of Burlington by 3 to 4 feet. This lowering in combination with the proposed 4 miles of upstream levee construction in the vicinity of Burlington will provide a higher degree of flood protection for that community.

I trust this letter will provide the desired information about the issues raised by Mrs. Mapes and also about the broader aspects of our planning for flood control in the Skagit River Valley.

Sincerely yours,

JACKSON GRAHAM
Major General, USA
Director of Civil Works

Copies furnished:
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