

Executive Summary

of the

Skagit Flood Risk Management Working Group

In July 2000, over 20 people gathered at the first meeting of the Skagit County Flood Risk Management Working Group (Working Group). The participants represented dike districts, local towns, farmers, Skagit County (County), Tribes, environmental groups, federal and state agencies and the Corps of Engineers (Corps). The purpose of the Working Group was to provide input to the County to help focus their efforts in analyzing potential alternatives for flood risk management along the Skagit River. This analysis will include an extensive environmental analysis and the involvement of experts from state and federal agencies and tribes. The product of the analysis, a Draft environmental impact statement (EIS) will detail potential environmental impacts from a range of alternatives, including a no-action alternative and alternatives that are identified as “preferred” for purposes of the analysis. A Draft EIS and public comments on it are predicates to the adoption of a Final EIS and ultimate selection of an alternative for flood risk management by the County. The County asked for the Working Group’s assistance in providing insights on stakeholder and agency representatives’ interests in and concerns about various flood risk management options. These insights would then be taken into account in the development of a Draft EIS.

During the process, the Working Group moved through three phases: first, a common basis of information was established; second, the Working Group discussed and created a spectrum of viable alternatives; and third, the Working Group identified the alternatives that they believe most warrant further study in the EIS process. During the first phase, the Working Group developed a list of many different flood risk management techniques to investigate. The topics focused on were overtopping levees, storage, levee setbacks, dredging, dams, bypasses, and the effects of these approaches on the environment including federally listed species and their habitat. The Working Group learned about the history, biology and hydrology of the river from local experts, examined flood events and discussed the potential pros and cons of various flood risk management options.

The Working Group, together with the County and the Corps, identified further alternatives for which the Working Group requested more information. These seven alternatives included: a large Swinomish diversion; a smaller Swinomish diversion combined with levee setbacks; overtopping; selected overtopping with ring dikes; levee setbacks; a Samish diversion; and a northern Swinomish diversion along Highway 20.

From the perspective of those in the Working Group, the two most interesting flood risk management alternatives for further study and design are levee setbacks to accommodate a 100-year flood and a diversion to take the floodwater into the Swinomish Channel. These alternatives were defined conceptually, with the understanding that details will be developed and considered later in the EIS and engineering design process. Although there was agreement among those present, several concerns remain about these two alternatives. The major concerns include impacts to eelgrass and the Padilla Bay

National Estuarine Research Reserve; levee setback costs associated with the land-fill disposition at Edgewater Park; location and possible removal of riprap in the channel; a tidegate structure at the end of the diversion channel; the potential for increasing development in the floodplain; instream flow requirements; the size and management of buffers in either alternative and the quality and quantity of salmon rearing habitat created or altered as a result of the project. These concerns as well as other environmental impacts of the project will be more fully analyzed and addressed during the EIS preparation process.

The Working Group understands that the County will continue to consult the public and consider information from resource agencies. Nonetheless, the Working Group agreed that these two design concepts hold promise and suggested that the County study them further for the purpose of the EIS analysis. The Working Group participants expressed appreciation that the County has solicited and is considering their input as the County and the Corps move ahead with planning and further public consultation.