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Did Hamilton take it on the chin for Burlington?

BURLINGTON — Did widespread flooding in the Hamilton area during last week's major event spare Burlington from serious damage?

That is one theory that some long-time flood-watchers, including City of Burlington Engineer Rod Garrett, believe may have happened when the Skagit spilled its banks on Tuesday, Oct. 21.

Besides the usual high water incidents and lots of sandbagging operations, activity in Burlington was lim-

ited. Predicted heights and pressure on the dikes that make up the city's southern border never materialized.

"I think that's because there are places in Hamilton that were never flooded before. The river spread out much more than anyone expected and it helped keep it all from coming over (the dikes) down here," said Garrett, who took a helicopter tour over the heaviest damage in the eastern parts of the county.

The flood gauge in Concrete hit

42.2 feet early Tuesday. Normally, that translates into a reading in Burlington and Mount Vernon of four feet less, or 38 feet. That would have put the dike at 10 feet over flood stage, which would have been a foot higher than the 1990 and 1995 floods. When all was said and done, however, the 2003 flood reached 36.2 feet.

"That's a huge difference — six feet between Concrete and Burlington. You have to think that extra water spread out somewhere else

between here and there," he added.

According to Garrett, it's a good thing for downriver communities the flood played out like it did. Otherwise, there would have been no place for the water to go except east toward I-5 and the city's business corridor.

Several years ago a plan was presented by Mayor Gus Tjeerdsma by which setback levees would be built along Anacortes Street and Whitmarsh Road to allow fields in that

area flood. The idea was kicked around but eventually fizzled out and since then that area has been developed into Skagit River Park.

Garrett said there was one area along that stretch, at the most southern tip of grass along Whitmarsh Road, that the city left undeveloped because it has always historically flooded.

"It allows the river a little room to spread out. It isn't much, but it's something," said Garrett.