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STEPHEN C. MERGLER — Editor and Publisher

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Courage to Do

The members of the board of Skagit county commissioners are well aware of the consequences of tinkering with the Skagit river's course when they propose to "do something" about the stream's steady encroachment on valuable farm lands east of Burlington and its threat to that city itself. That was made plain as day Tuesday night when Chairman Lowell Hughes told a chamber of commerce industrial development audience here of the commissioners' plans.

Hughes' frankness was refreshing, as he emphasized that "we are sticking our necks 'way out on this project." So little had been said recently of the proposal to start the river on a new course designed to eliminate the river's "oxbow" bend at Burlington and stop its present heavy erosion (erosion that has been moving ahead ominously during recent weeks' high water) that Hughes' comments took many of his listeners by surprise. The spirit of courage, in undertaking a project of such magnitude with its many uncertainties, is commendable on the part of the commissioners.

Eliminating the "Burlington Bend" of the Skagit probably will be only the beginning. The Skagit is a constantly shifting type of stream. One remedy may merely breed a new erosion problem at another point. Of this the county commissioners are well aware. But they are willing, backed by the best engineering advice they can obtain, to take the chances involved and to go ahead and try to do something about the river problem; that is much better than sitting back doing nothing for fear "something might happen".

Were the commissioners to take the latter course, there is danger that the whole lower Skagit valley might undergo drastic change. The flood control engineers agree that the river threatens to cut into Gage's slough, on the southeastern edge of Burlington and make a new channel through Whitney, or within eight or nine years to take out the Burlington-Sedro Woolley highway, the Great Northern right of way and work a new course running into the Samish river. Far-fetched? The engineers don't believe so.
