

AUGUST 23, 1962

Bypass Could Produce New Skagit Fish Runs

-- Start in 1964 Is Possibility

Development of new fish runs and of a several-mile length of excellent boating-swimming water are important by-products of the revived "Avon By-Pass" flood control plan for the Skagit valley that are being seriously studied.

Lloyd Johnson, county flood coordinator and secretary of the Skagit County Flood Control council's by-pass committee, said today that the U. S. Engineers had an outstanding fisheries consultant, Milo Bell, at work on the fish-producing potential of the project, the sports fishing division of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife service, Portland, was studying it, and the state fisheries department undoubtedly would become involved, too.

"The experts say near-ideal conditions could be provided for natural fish propagation and it is possible completely new runs of fish could be produced," Johnson said. Experiments at University of Washington have shown this possible.

The by-pass project could develop rapidly, because it would not be necessary to go through the laborious process of obtain-

ing congressional authorization. The authorization obtained in 1936 when the U. S. Engineers recommended a different version of the Avon by-pass would cover the present plan, and changes in federal flood control laws would ease some of the financing problems that helped stymie the project in the 1930s.

Johnson said it was possible the engineers could proceed with final design and construction as early as 1964. Needed would be a congressional appropriation plus agreement among the county, the diking districts and the state on ways to raise their four million dollar share in the cost.

The by-pass would be nearly eight miles long. It would be fresh water, fed from gates along the Skagit river above the Great Northern railway bridge north of Mount Vernon. A regulating weir a short distance west of the Skagit Valley Riding club track would keep salt water out of the upper watercourse, and gates at Padilla Bay would be used to control in-flow of salt water and outflow of water from the by-pass.

Revised Flood Plan Eyed

The "Avon by-pass" to sluice off Skagit river floor waters to Padilla bay is being revised as a "solution" to flood control here by the Corps of Army Engineers.

A committee from the Skagit County Flood Control council met with the county commissioner this week and agreed on a cooperative study of the project.

Proposed by the U. S. Engineers in 1936, the original by-pass plan was dropped because of local costs involved and because of strong objections based on the farm lands it would have taken out of production and feared effects on adjoining lands.

Now the engineers propose a 340 instead of a 1600 foot wide channel. And instead of a take-off point near Avon, they would set flood gates in the river bank above the Great Northern railway bridge north of Mount Vernon, utilize part of Gage's slough, go under the old and new 99 highways, pass under the Anacortes railroad branch near the Avon-Allen road, continue around between the foot of Bay View hill and the railway and empty through gates into Padilla bay a short distance north of Indian slough. Curving around the hill west of Fredonia grange, the flood channel would lie between the hill and the Skagit Valley Riding club's track.

About four million of the total nineteen million dollar estimated cost of the project would have to be raised by the county, the diking districts, the state and any flood control zones that might be set up under a 1961 statute. The balance would be expected to come from federal

treasury sources. The local agencies would have to furnish right of way and pay for the necessary highway bridges. The 1946 federal flood control act would relieve the local agencies from responsibility for paying for railroad bridge modifications.

The by-pass plan would protect the valley from a "30-year" flood, the engineers believe. Extreme floods tend to occur in 30-year cycles. Dike improvements made in recent years are believed to give satisfactory protection against a "10-year" flood. The by-pass could have lowered the Skagit river flood stages three to five feet and the river level from two to four feet in the North and South forks in the 1951 flood, which broke dikes on Fir Island, at Conway, and lapped the top of dikes elsewhere up and down the river.

The new plan is described as giving better flood protection to the area west from Sedro Woolley through Burlington and to the river water supplies for Anacortes, the refineries, LaConner and Whidbey naval air station.

Lloyd Johnson, county flood control coordinator and secretary of the flood council's by-pass committee, said the new channel might offer uses for fish farming, water recreation (boating, skiing), irrigation and water transportation as well as flood control.

The by-pass committee named by Earl Hanson, president of the county flood control council, consists of George Dynes, Dike Dist. No. 20, chairman; Tom Shane, Dike Dist. No. 1, and Noble Lee, Dike Dist. No. 2, and Engr. Johnson.