

# The Skagit News

OCTOBER 21, 1895

## MEMORIAL.

TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The undersigned citizens of Skagit County, State of Washington, believe that a fair consideration of the conditions surrounding the Skagit River and tributary country will induce such liberal action on the part of Congress as will meet the requirements of our present environments and prevent any disaster in the future such as we have suffered in the past.

Attached to this Memorial are statistics compiled with considerable care and which are known to be generally correct. We commend them to your careful consideration as supporting the statements in this Memorial.

In order that your Honorable Bodies may better understand the importance of this matter, we invite your attention to the present and constantly increasing commerce, foreign and domestic, of Puget Sound, and we also invite your examination of the geography of this immediate section, and the character and quantity of our products.

The surveys already made, and the map attached hereto sustain the statement that there are tributary to Skagit River about forty Townships, or over fourteen hundred square miles of land. A large proportion of this country is now, and all of it, when developed, must be largely dependent for its commerce on this important River. It is navigable for light draft Steamers from its mouth to Sauk City, a distance of about seventy miles, and at some seasons to Marblemount, fifteen miles above Sauk City.

An examination of the map of Washington will show the rise, course, length and disappearance of the Skagit in the broader and deeper waters of Puget Sound. The River is spanned by three large public bridges, each more than seven hundred feet in length, and with revolving draws more than two hundred feet, for the passage of Steamers engaged in commerce on the River.

A system of dikes extends on both sides of the River from its mouth to and above the village of Avon, about fifteen miles; and connecting with the main system, are other dikes, running across the level country toward LaConner and other points to the North and South of the River.

This diking system has been rendered necessary by the filling in of the bed and mouths of the River, from causes which will be explained, and ought to be remedied.

The system, already constructed and maintained, embraces one hundred and fifty-eight miles of dikes, and has cost in money and labor expended in construction, the large sum of three hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars. All of this has been expended by owners of land in the Skagit valley, including the residents of towns liable to inundation.

The maintenance of the dikes is now provided for in the laws of our State, but the tax levied under these laws is confined to the lands immediately affected, and aggregates about

twelve thousand dollars annually. We are confronted by the fact that each year these dykes must be wider and higher., because the bed of the river is constantly filling in, and no matter how well our work may be done there is an absolute certainty that every large freshet in the river will at weak points break the dykes and overflow and for miles inundate the surrounding country.

Before the mouth of the river began to be obstructed, the accumulating waters of the greatest freshets did not overflow the banks. A channel varying in depth from twelve to twenty feet was a sufficient outlet for all the water that passed in swift torrents from the mountains and highlands of the North and East. Resolute and industrious settlers reduced to cultivation the fertile lands of the Skagit valley, and made subservient to man, the thousands of acres that were a few years since inhabited by the beaver, and other animals whose pelts excited the cupidity of the hunter or the Indian. We do not believe that the famous lands of the Nile, or any other in the world are more fertile and productive. For years, these lands without fertilizers have yielded an average of one hundred bushels of oats to the acre, and the hay crop on the higher lands will average four tons. Fruits and vegetables grow in profusion, and their flavor and richness are unsurpassed. But all of this has involved a large expenditure of money and unremitting toil and patience on the part of our people.

Unless the Congress of the United States shall make an appropriation sufficient to clear out the mouth of the Skagit River, a very large proportion of this country must be abandoned.

The main channel or mouth of the River is now closed from an accumulation of logs, driftwood and sediment. Where a few years ago Steamers could safely navigate in fifteen feet of water persons can now walk from one bank of the River to the other on logs, or other obstruction. The only entrance from the Sound into the Skagit is by way of a small Slough, narrow and unsafe, and through which Steamers at high tide can find only about six feet of water. The North fork of the River, through which navigation was formerly maintained, is now practically closed, and no boat can traverse its waters. The South fork is only navigable from Fir, where it flows through and becomes a part of Steamboat Slough, heretofore mentioned.

Various reasons may be assigned for the obstruction and closing of the two mouths of the River, but until Boom Companies were permitted to place obstructions in the River and to locate their booms and appliances near the mouths, there was no trouble about overflows.

Thirty million feet of lumber in logs, is a fair estimate of the quantity that for each year and for many years have been rafted or floated down the Skagit. Most of it has been caught in the pockets of the booms and appliances, and in that way an immense number of large trees, stumps and other material drifted by the current, have found lodgment along the banks, in the channel and in the mouths of the River.

The tides ebb and flow from the Sound and Ocean, and thus the obstructions have become permanent and each year have increased in area, until the River no longer discharges its waters in quantity through its natural and original channels.

It is manifest therefore, that when the stream is swollen, and finds no outlet sufficient for its increased volume, that the waters are backed, and rise rapidly and with increasing force against the dikes bordering on and raising higher the banks of the Skagit. When such condition arises, it becomes only a question of a short time, how long the dikes can withstand the enormous pressure, how soon the water will overflow all the surrounding country, and destroy all that the labor and patience and capital of our people, have accomplished.

We call your attention to the fact that since November, 1892, the floods in the Skagit have four times swept over the banks, broken the dikes and inundated the surrounding country. The destruction of property by the overflow in November, 1892, and January, 1895, was not very

great, but the overflow in May, 1894, and June of that year entailed a direct loss on the people of the Skagit Valley as shown by estimates attached hereto, approximating one-half million of dollars.

The town of Mount Vernon was entirely flooded, small boats and rafts navigated the streets and the people were driven from their homes for safety to the hills. The damage to public and private property was great, and the suffering from exposure and sickness was distressing. All of these overflows have been caused by the ponding of the water in the river, resulting from the obstruction and closing the channels of the North and South Forks, above mentioned. There is comparatively little danger of loss from the overflow in the Winter, but in May and June, when the crops are most promising, the genial weather and hot suns melt the snow in the mountains, and the creeks and small rivers and mountain streams empty their waters into the Skagit which sweeps down with terrible fury completing its destructive mission.

It is a well known fact in this section, and the records of the War Department show, that some years ago, when Washington was a Territory, a large and formidable jam of logs, trees and other debris had collected about ten miles from the mouth of the River, and near where Mount Vernon now stands, entirely obstructing navigation. At a great expenditure of money and labor, the people resident in the Skagit valley, removed the jam, so that Steamers passed up and down the River in safety. Under the license of Territorial law, and with the knowledge of the officers of this great government, obstructions known as Log Booms have been placed in the River and near the mouths, since which times the difficulties and dangers that now surround us have arisen, and been allowed to continue.

Under the law, the General Government has ample jurisdiction in all matters affecting navigation waters, and we can only account for its failure to exercise that jurisdiction in this instance, from the neglect to bring the matter to your attention, and to press it with the zeal that its importance demands.

The earnest efforts of our people to protect ourselves, and the temporary relief that has been afforded by the construction and maintenance of our diking system, may to some extent account for the neglect that has theretofore surrounded this destructive nuisance, but the situation has now assumed such grave consequences, that it cannot longer be overlooked or permitted to continue.

Until the obstructions in the River, and at its mouth, are removed, the further construction and maintenance of our diking system cannot protect us; until the channel of the River shall be restored as it was before obstructions were permitted to be made and to stand, the navigation of the Skagit must at all times be uncertain and dangerous; and in a very few years must cease altogether.

We do not believe that an intelligent examination into this matter will show that its importance has been overestimated by us; nor is this the first time that we have endeavored to bring it to your attention. Memorials from our people have already been forwarded to Congress, praying some action on behalf of this section, and at the last session of our Legislature, a joint Memorial of that body was unanimously passed for the same object.

Thoroughly impressed with the justice of his appeal, we respectfully submit it to your good judgment and earnestly hope for an early and favorable consideration by your Honorable Bodies, and by such other authorities as shall have this matter in immediate charge.