

Army engineers reply to writer

The United States Army Corps of Engineers replied officially and at length today to a Skagit Valley Herald columnist.

Herald writer George Geasey remarked in his June 7 "Left and Right" column that a Seattle disc jockey had broadcast reports the previous weekend that the Skagit River at Mount Vernon would reach a crest of 21 feet, which he termed the flood stage for the river at that point.

GEASEY DISPUTED the report and noted that the river's flood stage at Mount Vernon actually is 27 feet.

The Army Engineers replied today that 21 feet is decidedly a flood stage for the river at their gauge in Mount Vernon. They explained the the United States Geological Survey operates another gauge upstream one mile where the "zero damage" point, or crest, is 27 feet.

"Local persons not familiar with the flood problem on the river are frequently confused by the difference in gauges and the reference stages," the Corps explained.

The U.S. Weather Bureau River Forecast Center at Portland makes forecasts based on the Engineers' staff gauge known as the Skagit River gauge, whose zero damage point is 21 feet.

ON THE WEEKEND to which Geasey referred the U.S. Weather Bureau River Forecast Center at Portland noted a rapid rise on the Skagit River at Concrete on the first and second of June as the result of temperatures much above normal in the mountains.

Believing that his might cause some concern and raise questions by residents of the Skagit Valley, the River Forecast Center prepared a crest forecast for the Skagit River at Mount Vernon. On June 2 it issued a peak-stage forecast of 20.5 feet to occur on the afternoon of June 3.

The morning of June 3 the Center revised this to call for a crest of 20 feet that afternoon.

Only once-a-day reports are available and the report for 7 a.m. on June 4 showed the stage at Mount Vernon was 19.5 feet and falling.

WHEN THE River Forecast

Center issues a crest-stage forecast, it is received in the Weather Bureau office at Seattle-Tacoma Airport on a regular teletype circuit. The Weather Bureau then puts this information on a weather circuit which carries it to newspapers, radio and television stations. This explains how the Seattle disc jockey might be giving reports.

From records available at upstream gauges and the observed stage of 19.5 feet and falling at Mount Vernon, the Weather Bureau forecast of the crest stage was quite accurate, according to Col. R. P. Young, Seattle District Engineer, and the Weather Bureau was justified in making the forecast.

The Army Engineers add this advice for river watchers:

"TO AVOID confusion, residents may note that 21 feet on the gauge at Skagit River at Mount Vernon means zero damage, but anything above 21 results in some flood damage.

"Residents would be living with a false sense of security if they believed 27 feet meant zero dam-

age—for a stage of 27 feet on the gauge used by the Weather Bureau, Corps of Engineers and Skagit County personnel concerned with flood situations, would result in severe flooding and a critical situation in the lower Skagit River."

The Corps of Engineers also includes this wry note in its response to the Herald columnist's report:

"The Army's Corps of Engineers was neither having a bad weekend on the job nor too good a weekend off the job" on the weekend in question. Geasey had used those phrases in opening his comments on the river reports.

Meanwhile, columnist Geasey was reportedly floating downstream along the Skagit early his morning eating his June 7 words and waving a white flag.