

Avon Bypass foes speak at hearing

Opponents of the Avon Bypass flood control plan last night expressed doubts the proposed project will offer a long-range solution to the Skagit River's major overflows.

Meeting with proponents of the proposal, representatives of the opposition, many of them owners of land along the tentative Bypass route, appeared to favor a flood control program utilizing a well-dredged channel along the existing riverbed and an Upper Skagit Valley dam system.

FAST CONTROL

But Ray Skrinde, a spokesman at the meeting for the United States Army Corps of Engineers, called the proposed Bypass the fastest, surest way to control Skagit River floods. He said:

"We've found that the Bypass would present the most economical way to get a pretty big chunk of storage for flood protection."

Last night's meeting, held informally at the Northwestern Washington Experiment Station, came to an end with Earl Hanson, president of the Skagit County Flood Control Council, assuring the audience that no action can be taken until a study whose approval is sought in the 1963 state Legislature determines the feasibility of the Bypass project.

Hanson also explained that local financing of the Bypass probably cannot be undertaken with a vote of the people, since the levying of tax millage over the 40-mill limit will apparently be required to provide a share of local support.

NOT ALL OPPOSED

Not all the 50 or more persons attending last night's session were against the Bypass. The meeting was called at the request of persons living along the proposed Bypass route.

Several opponents levelled criticism and questions at Skrinde's estimate that the Bypass will produce a million dollars in annual benefits for the Skagit Valley, largely by eliminating losses resulting from floods.

Such a flood loss figure met with criticism from a number of persons in the audience. One of them, James Agen, of rural Mount Vernon, said he doubted floods had cost the Skagit Valley a million dollars in actual damages over an entire 30-year period.

Another opponent said Skagit River flood waters had actually made his farmland more productive.

Spokesmen for the opposition also questioned the protection offered by the Bypass against the worst floods occurring about once every 30 years in the Valley.

PART OF PLAN

Skrinde explained the Bypass probably would be of little relief

during such 30-year floods, but he added that the current proposal is part of a general Skagit River basin study which also will eventually call for a system of levee improvements and upstream storage to complete a defense against even the most serious floods.

Although Skrinde frequently said last night that deepening and widening of the Skagit River for navigation would be of little help to flood control, spokesmen for the opposition maintained a river dredging program would be a more feasible method of control than the Bypass.

A \$19,000,000 estimated cost figure for the Bypass includes \$725,000 for purchase of right-of-way, the Army Engineer representative told last night's audience. Using that sum, he said the federal agency is using an aver-

age figure of \$1,000 an acre for right-of-way purchase to obtain a route for the Bypass.

Skrinde also explained that the cost of building ten county, state and railway bridges over the Bypass is included in the \$19,000,000 estimated cost figure. The federal government, he noted, will supply \$15,000,000 of the total, with Skagit County and the state to provide the remainder.

STATE SHARE

Skagit County Engineer Lloyd Johnson said the Avon Bypass Committee hopes to have the state pay for \$1,450,000 in bridges as its share of the project's cost.

Johnson added that elimination or postponement in the construction of some bridges at the county level might result in saving local funds.

Asked last night about a timetable for the project, Skrinde said the Army Engineers hope to start design work and detailed layouts for the Bypass by July 1, 1964. Such work and procurement of right-of-way will take about two years, he estimated. Another two years after that will be needed to complete the project, he said.

Skrinde told his audience last night the Bypass probably will have to be used only once every five or ten years when a major flood threatens the Skagit Valley. It will however reduce the Valley's peril from a present level of once every 7½ years for a flood of medium or major proportions to once every 30 years.

One opponent termed such a \$19,000,000 "insurance policy" against floods "foolhardy."

STUDY FAVORED

Proponents of the Bypass spoke from the audience late in last night's meeting, but they offered unqualified support for the project. One, Noble Lee, of Fir Island, called the Bypass the answer to his area's flood problems.

Others in the audience, either fully opposing nor supporting the project, favored the feasibility study now being sought in the Legislature.

Hanson served as chairman of last night's meeting. George Dynes, Avon Bypass Committee Chairman, also spoke briefly. County Engineer Johnson outlined the history of Skagit River floods, and Skrinde explained details of the Bypass proposed functions.

All three Skagit County Commissioners — Scott Richards, Claude Wilson and James Wylie — attended last night's meeting.