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Long-range flood plan for Skagit holds ramifications

Skagit County officials were given a tool for flood plain management Wednesday at Mount Vernon.

It was the Skagit River Flood Information Report, prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the request of the State Department of Conservation on behalf of the citizens of Skagit County.

Presentation of the report was made to the Skagit Board of County Commissioners by H. Maurice Ahlquist, director of the Department of Conservation and by Gregory M. Hastings, supervisor of the department's division of flood control.

Representatives of the Corps and other federal agencies were present and took part in the presentation.

While it did not fall as a bombshell, the report, as expected, set forth some long-range requirements for flood control of the Skagit River which would have a profound effect on Skagit County, especially in regard to future planning and development.

For it carried with it President Johnson's executive order to federal agencies providing that federal construction as well as federal loans and grants be based upon such planning, "tak-

ing into account flood hazards when evaluating plans." more more more

One question observers considered to be of paramount importance was asked during the question-answer period of the meeting conducted at the Cascade Natural Gas Co. auditorium: "Is the plan with its requirements subject to revision as needs arise?"

The answer, given by Ahlquist, was also seen as significant. "This report is not God's word," he said. "The Corps has done the best it can with the information available." He did not state to what extent the plan might be revised.

It was made clear, however, that implementation of the study is in the hands of local officials. "You are in the driver's seat now," one official told the county commissioners.

George Lemke, Seattle, who represented Col. C. C. Holbrook, district engineer of the Corps, clarified this. "This report is not an edict," he said. "The decision to carry out its recommendations are yours at the local level."

Hastings asked this question, "Is Skagit County being picked on?" He then answered negatively, stating, "Skagit County has used more state flood control maintenance funds since 1943 than any other county in the state. It has consistently had a flood control program, which speaks for the county's interest in a constructive effort.

"We are undertaking to assist you in this program simply because of the previous investment of state and county funds and because circumstances here merit it more than in any other county at present," said Hastings.

"The answer is a flood plain management set of rules, and this report is the tool to provide those rules. It suggests the most wise and beneficent use of the flood plain area," Hastings stated.

The ultimate of the plan is for 100-year flood control of the Skagit River basin.

"The information, as presented in this Skagit River Report, points out the need for changing our ideas and methods of reducing the recurring flood damage in the county. It will be largely up to you to assist in bringing about the acceptance of

these ideas," Ahlquist stated at the outset.

"Your county commissioners and planning commission have already considered the aspects of such regulations but they cannot do the job alone. They need your backing, both privately and in public, for their job will be a big one," he said. "And you must be willing to live with, and comply with, the restrictions — along with everyone else in the county.

"You can be assured that the state will lend any assistance and guidance possible to enable Skagit County to progress in a manner that will be compatible to the hazard that exists."

One theme of the meeting was that many residents underestimate the danger of floods and "build and plan as though no hazard exists."

George Dynes, local land developer long active in water management, said local matching costs of the plan would come to \$6 million. "Without the money for that part, we'd be dead in the water," he said.

"Right now the state has no money with which to help you," said Ahlquist.