

FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION ISSUE PAPER

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The flood plain of the Lower Skagit River Delta represents the worst example of flood plain management in the Pacific Northwest. The existing Skagit County Comprehensive Plan represents a continuation of this management policy.

The Corps of Engineers has just completed a reconnaissance study dealing with flood damage reduction alternatives for the Lower Skagit River Basin (from Sedro Woolley downstream). We estimate approximately \$400 million in damages in a 100 year flood event. This analysis also shows that there are no locations in the lower basin that are safe from a 50 year event.

To recommend further development in this basin will cause a significant increase in damages when a large flood occurs. The flooding that we just had on the Mississippi River System must serve as a warning of what happens when flood plains are developed.

The thrust of a good Comprehensive Plan should be to try and reduce the flood damages that will occur by stopping any further growth in the flood plain and by trying to open up existing floodways that have been blocked by development.

Currently the cities and the county are using the FEMA 100 year flood (base flood) elevations as a planning tool. FEMA did an excellent job in initiating its program and in getting some kind of flood plain regulations in effect. The hydraulic analysis used for the FEMA model was a fairly simple one, and one that is not adequate for development decisions today.

One example of poor flood plain management is the Gages Slough floodway in Burlington. Historically this floodway has seen flows from 30,000 to 60,000 cfs with significant flooding in Burlington and out to Padilla Bay and Samish Bay. This floodway has been blocked by road fills, malls and Interstate 5. This development will cause significant damages to itself and increased damage to the rest of Burlington. The current plan recommends an Urban Growth Area (UGA) right across the upstream end of this floodway.

Another example is in the Hamilton area. Skagit County has been working hard with FEMA to relocate the town of Hamilton, most of which lies in the floodway. The current plan recommends a UGA in this area of Hamilton right down to the river.

There is significant pressure to increase the tax base of the cities and the county by developing the flood plain. Hopefully, this leadership will be enlightened and visionary enough not to recommend any further development within the flood plain.

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