SKAGIT FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION STUDY AND ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT

The project must comply with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) that requires an environmental impact statement (EIS) in accordance with:

40 CFR
Protection of Environment
CHAPTER V
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

40 CFR Part 1501.7 requires a process for determining the scope and significant issues to be analyzed in depth in the environmental impact statement. Part 1501.7 further requires that issues that are not significant be eliminated. The law also states the agency shall revise previous scoping determinations if substantial changes are made later in the proposed action, or if significant new circumstances or information arise which bear on the proposal.

Substantial changes have been made to the project since the inception of the Skagit River Flood Damage Protection project. Economic information used in the reconnaissance report dated May 1993 was information compiled in the 1970's and suggested that a limited project would justify Federal involvement. The County entered into a feasibility cost sharing agreement with the Corps of Engineers in 1997 for conducting a flood damage reduction feasibility study/EIS. The initial EIS scoping of the project was conducted at that time. Puget Sound Chinook salmon were listed on the endangered species list in 1999 and Bull trout were listed in year 2000. Using current data for hydraulic modeling and economic analysis, results indicated that the flood damage potential for the Skagit delta was much greater than previously thought. Habitat restoration has also been added as an element of the project. The potential multi-benefits of the project are very significant.

Proposal: To accurately identify the environmental response to a flood control/restoration project, the existing conditions in the event of a large flood need to be analyzed. The Corps hydraulic model of the lower Skagit River identifies probable levee failure points that result in flood waters draining to Skagit, Padilla, and Samish Bays as well as the Swinomish Channel. The risks associated with the "do-nothing" alternative need to be identified. A numerical model of the sediment transport and salinity changes to the entire lower Skagit River system (including the bays and Swinomish Channel) should be performed prior to doing any other environmental analyses. This hydrodynamic model can then be used to provide information for a "risk based" analysis of the impacts to the environment under the existing conditions. Once that model has been developed, the alternatives under consideration should be incorporated to predict the system response. Biological studies should only be performed when physical changes due to the operation of each of the alternatives is more clearly understood. The Columbia River Channel Improvement Re-consultation Project should be used as a template for continuing the EIS effort.
See www.sei.org/columbia/home.html.

40 CFR Part 1501.7 (a) (5) Public environmental impact statements that are related need to be indicated.

Projects with potential environmental impacts relative to this project include the USACE maintenance dredging of the Swinomish Channel, the BIA Swinomish Channel marina, and the proposed pier repair at Marches Point by Equilon Enterprises. These projects have or will need to assess environmental constraints within the study area and establish precedence.