



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services
2625 Parkmont Lane, Bldg. B
Olympia, Washington 98502

Re: ES

March 11, 1977

Colonel John A. Poteat
District Engineer
Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box C-3755
Seattle, Washington 98124

Dear Colonel Poteat:

This planning aid letter concerns your proposed channel and levee improvement project for the lower Skagit River, from the Burlington - Mt. Vernon area downstream to the mouths of both forks. We previously provided comments on this proposed project in our interim report dated May 20, 1964, signed by Paul T. Quick, then Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The central issue in that report was the now defunct Avon bypass proposal; relatively little attention was given the proposed channel and levee work. This letter reflects our current thinking on these proposed improvements.

Your current proposal calls for modifying about 34 miles of the existing levee system by increasing top widths, flattening side slopes, and adding riprap at selected locations. Channel widening is also proposed for three constricted reaches of the river channel. This work would entail removing and replanting fairly large amounts of existing sod cover, and a sizable reseeding program for recontoured levee banks.

Our 1974 report indicated the channel and levee improvements noted above would have little effect on fish and fishing, provided that unnecessary turbidity and siltation were avoided, and interference with anadromous fish movement were minimized. Effects on wildlife were also predicted to be minimal.

However, based on a recent visual inspection of several portions of the project site, and Service experience with other levee improvement projects in the State of Washington subsequent to the 1964 report, we believe that several very positive features may be incorporated in the project. These features include, as a minimum, the following:



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- 1) Fencing to prevent cattle grazing on top and riverward levee slopes. Such restriction would curtail introduction of animal wastes in river waters, reduce turf and soil disruption and associated erosion along riverbanks, and encourage development of riparian vegetation which creates and improves fish and wildlife habitat.
- 2) Reseeding efforts directed towards establishing riparian vegetation conducive to enhancing fish and wildlife habitat. This would include soil preparation, fertilization, seeding and/or planting of grasses, legumes and shrubs, and possibly irrigation of denuded levee banks in a manner acceptable to the Service and Washington Game Department, the specifics of which would be determined at a later date.
- 3) Only necessary removal of existing riparian vegetation where such vegetation is presently thriving and providing food, cover, and other benefits to fish and wildlife.
- 4) A general cleanup of trash and debris along inner levee slopes to facilitate unrestricted passage of flood water without eddies which cause erosion.

The comments above reflect our present concerns in project planning. We recommend that they be considered as mitigation and be included in project costs not borne by the sponsor. Please contact us for any clarification. We anticipate developing more detailed recommendations in upcoming months.

Sincerely,



J. Norvell Brown
Field Supervisor

cc: WDG