

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.0 Purpose

This plan is an update to the *Skagit River Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan* (CFHMP) of 1989. Its purpose is to continue to provide a comprehensive approach to flood control management that benefits people and property by reducing flood hazard risks. Damage caused by flooding in the Skagit River basin has been great; it reveals the constant importance of and need for flood control improvements in Skagit County. Protecting ~~The presence of fishery and other wildlife resources primarily salmon and steelhead, is a key consideration~~ is a critical component of flood management as well. Therefore, ecosystem restoration will be considered when evaluating possible flood risk reduction measures.

~~The purpose of comprehensive flood control management planning is to establish the need for flood control maintenance work, define structural alternatives, identify and consider potential impacts of in-stream flood control work on in-stream resources, and identify the river's floodway. (Skagit County, 1989)~~



Fairhaven Avenue, Burlington, WA – Looking East (1921)
(Courtesy of Roger Fox Collection)

A CFHMP provides a forum for addressing numerous interrelated issues. We are learning that flood plains are laden with complex planning issues ranging from biological resource protection, geohydrological engineering, land use development and aesthetics, open space, and recreation

objectives. Therefore, it makes sense to address these issues comprehensively, and a plan provides the impetus and funding to do so. Most importantly it offers the opportunity for differing interest groups and parties to sit down and resolve their often conflicting objectives. In this way, the planning process is a forum for conflict resolution regarding planning and resource protection issues based on community needs. Current conflict mediation theory recommends that a mutually agreeable solution be sought through outlining goals and identifying options to produce solutions that optimize all participant objectives. This is just the type of process that is recommended for flood hazard management planning.

This plan also provides the technical foundation for future flood hazard management recommendations. For example, following a flood in which levees are destroyed, the plan will provide insight as to whether those levees should be rebuilt to preflooding conditions or if they should be lowered, modified (overtopping levees, setback levees) or eliminated all together. (Ecology, 1991)

1.1 Scope and Organization

~~This document identifies watershed and flooding characteristics, flood hazard areas, flood storage and conveyance areas, flood hazard management options, and recommended actions. (Snohomish County, 2003)~~

~~The Skagit River CFHMP contains the following:~~

Chapter 1 ~~lays out~~ states the purpose, scope and organization, and funding benefits of the Skagit River CFHMP.

Chapter 2 provides a description of the Skagit River Watershed ~~including the Skagit and Samish Rivers.~~

Chapter 3 ~~5~~ contains federal, state, and local policies for floodplain, flood risk management, ecosystem protection, and restoration.

Chapter 4 ~~3~~ briefly explains the fundamentals of flooding, flood terminology, the causes and types of flooding.

Chapter 5 ~~4~~ contains information regarding flood warning and operations in the Skagit River Basin, including emphasis on Flood Awareness Week.

Chapter 6 gives a detailed account of the history of flooding in the Skagit River Basin.

Chapter 7 continues with historical flood management that has taken place in the Skagit River Basin.

Chapter 8 ~~9~~ ~~lists reveals~~ the flood management strategies ~~or measures created by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Skagit River General Investigation.~~ ~~best suited for the area,~~ and the criteria with which they were selected.

Chapter 9 ~~8~~ describes the ~~interim~~ short-term and long-term goals for flood management goals and criteria, by which strategies or measures can be selected, as adopted by the Skagit County Flood Control Zone District's Advisory Committee.

Chapter 10 provides full evaluation and discussion of the flood management strategies selected and offers a recommended plan.

Chapter 11 ~~offers a recommended plan for flood management in the Skagit River Basin.~~

Appendix A – Glossary

Appendix B – Acronyms

Appendix C – Skagit River Environmental Baseline Report Upper Basin

Appendix D – Skagit River Environmental Baseline Report Lower Basin

Appendix E – Lower Samish River Basin Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan

Appendix F - The Original Fifteen Site Map

1.2 Flood Control Assistance Account Program (FCAAP) Funding Benefits

The Washington State program to assist local jurisdictions in comprehensive planning and flood control maintenance is described in the state statute *State Participation in Flood Control Maintenance*, Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 86.26, which was enacted in 1951 and amended in 1984. Funds for flood management maintenance projects and preparation of comprehensive plans are available through the ~~Flood Control Assistance Account Program~~ (FCAAP). Procedural information relating to FCAAP and RCW 86.26 can be found in Administration of the Flood Control Assistance Account Program, Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 173-145.

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) distributes FCAAP grant money based on the amount appropriated by the State Legislature each biennium, and the eligibility of the applicant and the proposed project. Proposals are reviewed by several state agencies to ensure that appropriate resource issues and regulations are adequately addressed.

Legislative appropriations for FCAAP grants have varied from no appropriations (during the years 1975 through 1985) to \$4.0 million during the 2000 biennium.

The following restrictions apply to the use of the FCAAP grants:

- Grants are limited to 50 percent of the total cost for non-emergency projects.
- The non-emergency FCAAP contribution is limited to \$500,000 per county.
- Maximum emergency funds of \$150,000 per county per biennium are available on a first come/first serve basis; and the state will fund up to 80 percent of the cost of emergency projects.
- Unused emergency funds (\$500,000 total emergency fund) can be disbursed on a discretionary basis by Ecology.
- The state can fund 75 percent of the cost for comprehensive plans.

This plan follows state requirements regarding the preparation of flood hazard plans and conforms to the following procedures described in Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 86.26 and Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 173-145:

- Establish a citizen and agency participation process known as the Flood Control Zone District, which is made up of an Advisory Committee and three Technical Committees (Dike and Drainage Districts, Environmental, and Land Use);
- Set short-term and long-term goals and objectives for flood hazard management;
- Determine the need for and identify alternatives for flood hazard management measures;
- Evaluate alternative measures;
- Complete the draft Skagit River CFHMP and associated documentation;
- Submit the final Skagit River CFHMP to the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology);
- Hold a public hearing and adopt the Skagit River CFHMP; and,
- Notify Ecology that the Skagit River CFHMP was adopted.

Once Ecology has reviewed this plan, implementation actions will be eligible for state funding through the FCAAP. (Snohomish County, 2003)

[It should also be noted, the use of this plan may be beneficial for other sources of funding that require a view of Skagit County's flood control efforts and suggested improvements.](#)

1.3 Public Involvement

Because flood hazard management encompasses a broad spectrum of environmental, social/cultural, political, engineering and resource utilization issues, an explicit public decision-making process is needed to develop a recommended course of action. Citizen participation is essential to consider community concerns and to educate local residents on the fundamentals of responsible, effective flood hazard management. Planning must be a team effort, which integrates community development regulations and environmental enhancement activities. (Ecology, 1991)

1.3.1 Skagit River General Investigation

A United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) reconnaissance study was conducted, resulting in a May 1993 Reconnaissance Report, identifying a Federal interest in conducting a feasibility level study to investigate flood damage reduction measures in the Skagit River basin. The Report identified the following as the alternative with Federal interest:

Upgrading about 39 miles of existing river levees and providing about 11 new levees, five levee overflow segments, and about a mile of overbank widening (several hundred feet) between Burlington and Mount Vernon.

In July 1997, Skagit County and the Corps executed a Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement (FCSA) to initiate feasibility studies. The original focus of the feasibility study, as scoped in the June 1997 Project Management Plan (PMP), was to formulate solutions to severe flooding problems in the study area.

During execution of the early technical studies, the need for ecosystem restoration planning was identified to address new environmental challenges including recent listings of endangered species such as Puget Sound Chinook salmon and bull trout, and the potential listing of Coho salmon and steelhead in the near future. The Corps and Skagit County determined that the incorporation of ecosystem restoration features into the design of a flood damage reduction solution was desirable to developing an acceptable and responsible plan. The addition of ecosystem restoration as a secondary project purpose is consistent with Corps policy to insure compatibility between projects and the environment. The PMP was amended in 2004 to incorporate environmental restoration into the study plan.

The feasibility phase of project development involves technical studies to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, acceptability, and completeness of a range of alternative solutions to serious flooding problems, potential early action flood damage reduction measures, and ecosystem restoration opportunities in the study area. The implicit intent is that the recommended plan will have broad federal and non-federal support, will provide critically needed flood damage reduction benefits at an affordable cost in a reasonable time frame, will provide cost-effective ecosystem restoration benefits in the project area, and will subsequently be authorized and implemented.

Skagit County is the cost sharing local sponsor for this feasibility study. As the Corps of Engineers partner, the County has provided technical and project management support throughout the study process. Technical areas addressed by the County included real estate and survey support, development of design and costs for the evaluation of measures, public involvement, and development of alternative designs and costs. If a project is implemented, the local sponsor will be responsible for all necessary lands, easements, rights of way, relocations and disposal areas (LERRD) and rights of entry for the project site; as well as project operation and maintenance.



First Street, Mount Vernon, WA (late 1800s)
(Courtesy of Roger Fox Collection)

There are many stakeholders associated with this project. The following stakeholders have had direct involvement in the study:

- Washington Department of Ecology
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington Department of Natural Resources
- Washington Department of Transportation
- Salmon Recovery Funding Board
- Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad
- City of Anacortes
- City of Burlington
- City of Mount Vernon
- City of Sedro-Woolley
- Town of Concrete
- Town of Hamilton
- Town of LaConner
- Town of Lyman

- Dike District 1
- Dike District 3
- Dike District 12
- Dike District 17
- Dike District 20
- Dike District 22
- Skagit County Flood Control Zone District
- Skagit River System Cooperative
- State Historic Preservation Office
- Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- Puget Sound Energy
- Seattle City Light
- The Nature Conservancy
- Skagit Watershed Council (USACE, 2009)

1.3.2 Flood Control Committee

The Flood Control Committee (FCC) was established in 1980 to prepare and recommend an update of the Skagit River CFHMP. The group was comprised of several representatives from the towns and cities, dike districts, specially affected areas like Sterling and Allen, and the Board of Skagit County Commissioners (BCC). The plan was reviewed during public hearings in September and October of 1988. The plan was finalized in April of 1989.

1.3.3 Skagit River Impact Partnership

Skagit County entered into the Skagit River Impact Partnership (SRIP) in 2005 to oversee the study, planning, permitting, funding, and implementation of flood damage reduction measures along the Skagit River. It is comprised of local government entities in accordance with RCW 39.34.

1.3.4 Flood Control Zone District

In 2007, Skagit County realized a broader spectrum of representatives was needed in updating the Skagit River CFHMP. Staff began implementing steps towards reestablishing the Flood Control Zone District (FCZD), which was originally created in 1970. By November of 2007, the FCZD became the official mechanism by which stakeholders could provide information and recommendations to the BCC. With this change, came the dissolution of the FCC.

The FCZD is made up of four committees: one advisory and three technical. The BCC, or FCZD Board of Supervisors, oversees the FCZD Advisory Committee (AC) and County

Engineer. The FCZD AC oversees the Dike and Drainage Districts Technical Committee (DDTC), Environmental Technical Committee (ETC), and Land Use Technical Committee (LUTC). In turn, the County Engineer oversees county staff and consultants.

The mission of the Skagit River Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan is to develop a comprehensive approach to Skagit River flood hazard reduction and management that decreases the flood hazard risk to people, property, infrastructure, fish and wildlife resources, and economic vitality, advances river restoration and other community interests, and reduces long-term costs associated with flood management and infrastructure maintenance. (FCZD, 2009)

The group meets every month to discuss the update of the CFHMP, and other topics that include reducing flood risks, funding, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood map revisions.

1.4 CFHMP Review Process and Schedule

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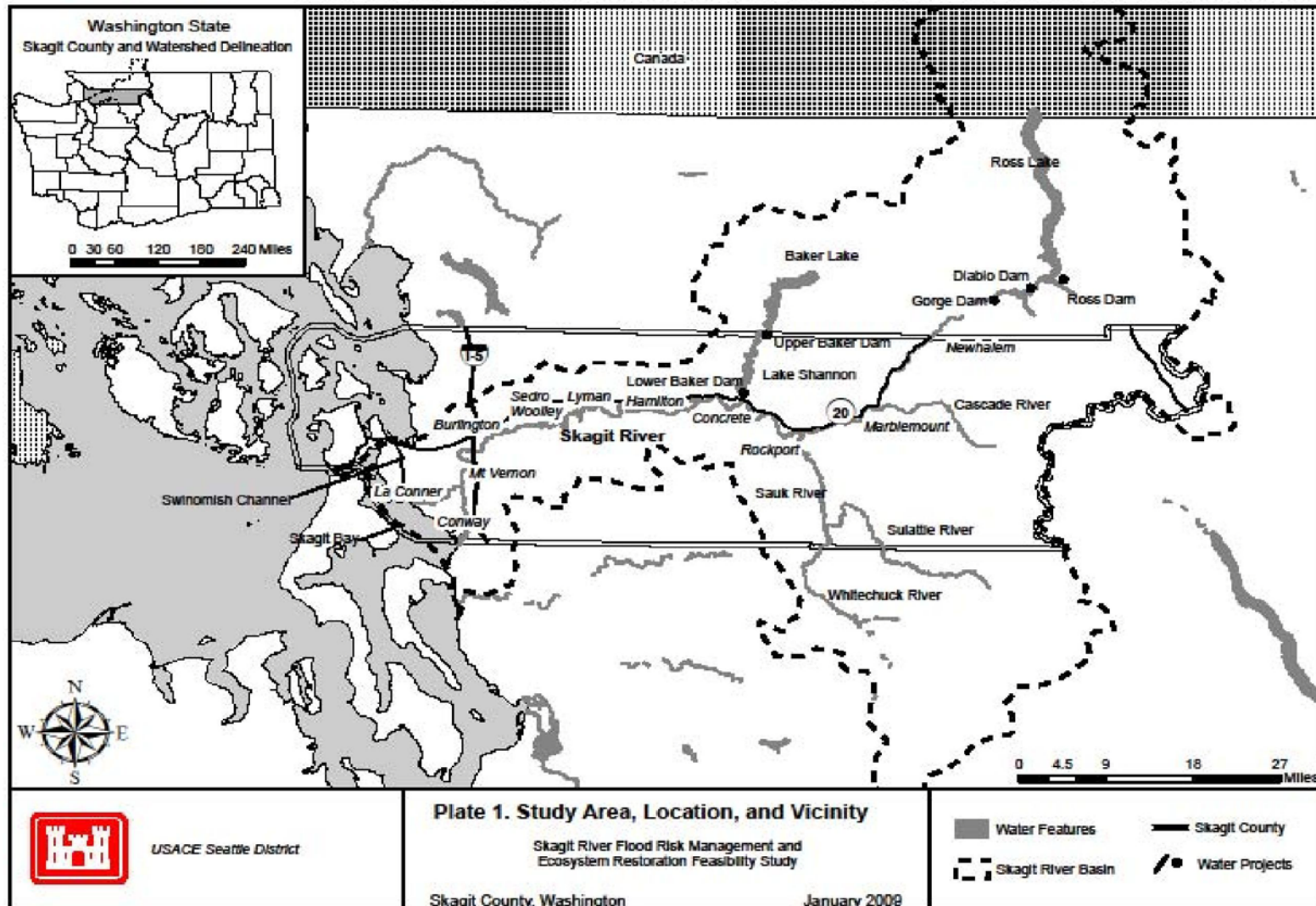
~~1.3.5 Mission, Goals and Objectives of the Flood Control Zone District~~

~~1.3.6 Additional Outreach Efforts~~

1.5 Plan Approval and Implementation

Following public comment on and revision of this draft plan, it will be forwarded to Ecology for its review and approval. The final plan will then be submitted to the Skagit County Board of Commissioners for its consideration and adoption. Once the final plan is adopted, implementation of prioritized actions will be initiated based on availability of funds from the FCAAP, County, and other sources. Full implementation of this plan will take time. It will involve the full participation of those who helped develop the plan and others. (Snohomish, 2003)

Figure 1.1 – Study Area, Location, and Vicinity



(USACE, 2009)

1.6 References

Skagit County. 1989. *Skagit County Comprehensive Flood Control Management Plan*. Skagit County, WA. Consulting Engineers: Brown and Caldwell.

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). 2009. *Skagit River Flood Risk Management and Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study - Read Ahead Draft*. Skagit County, WA. Consulting Engineers: Tetra Tech.

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