

14 MARCH 1984

Mr. Jess Knutzen
Chairman
Skagit County Flood Control Advisory Committee
1183 Avon Allen Road
Burlington, Washington

Dear Jess;

As you know, I have served on the Flood Control Committee since its conception as the representative from the Nookachamp/Clear Lake area. Recently I sold my farm and have moved south of Mt. Vernon. I feel that this move disqualifies me from participating as a voting member and hereby offer you my resignation effective immediately.

Under normal circumstances the above would suffice as justification enough for my resigning. However, for me to say anything with just those few of words would be stepping out of character. So I submit to you the following: a summation of my feelings towards flood control, floodplain management, and the direction that the flood control committee should continue on.

First, Flood Control. Having served as one of the few elected members to the flood control committee I have spent the last few years thoroughly researching and analyzing all possibilities with regards to flood control features for Skagit County. From dams on the Sauk River to diking, and from dredging the river to what the old timers call the Avon ByPass plan, (it would be more appropriate because of its location to rename the plan, the BURLINGTON BYPASS). In my opinion, the BURLINGTON BYPASS is the only flood control option that will ever be implemented in Skagit County.

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A dam on the Sauk River is out not only because of the Wild and Scenic designation but also because it is engineeringly impossible to build a concrete structure that would provide 100 year flood protection in that area, 67% of all the steelhead in the Skagit spawn to the Sauk River and would be destroyed, hundreds of homes would have to be destroyed and the dam is cost prohibitive, (approx. cost 200 to 400 million of which local cost would be anywhere from 40 to 80 million.)

For the committee to waste any more time on the Sauk River Dam would be a great injustice to the people of Skagit County.

Dredging is out because you can't dig the river deep enough fast enough so long as the dikes set right next to the river in order for the channel to handle 240,000 cfs. A physical as well as an economic impossibility.

Raising the dikes is out because of the extreme adverse impacts that has on the community of Clear Lake and the Nookachamp, Sterling Hill, Samish River farming communities. No one has the right to divert or otherwise displace the natural course of floodwaters at the expense of their neighbors. No one. Not communities or private property owners or diking districts, sub flood control zones or state or federal or county agencies. No one. This is something that the floodplain residents of Skagit County are going to have to come to grips with. That besides buying private property rights you are also buying responsibilities.

The AVON/BURLINGTON BYPASS on the other hand is the one project where if it was handled properly is a project where everyone could come out a winner. If all went according to plan, not only would the entire lower valley never again be subject to flooding, (or floodplain management regulations), the people of Skagit County would be permanently preserving 60,000 acres of prime agriculture farmland (which in and of itself would act a magnet for every food processor, cheese factory, and cannery on the west coast), creating eight miles of wetlands for all associated flora and fauna, creating at least one and possibly two fish hatcheries, creating one of the best bass fishing areas in the state (thereby adding to the local tourist economy). As to the cost factor (60 to 90 million), if the development rights to the farmland (farmland that is never going to be allowed to be developed anyway under current conditions), were traded for the BYPASS, the cost benefit ratio would be so great in favor of the project that NO LOCAL MONIES WOULD BE REQUIRED TO PAY FOR THE PROJECT.

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The main justification for building the BURLINGTON BYPASS is that, THATS WHERE THE MAIN FORCE OF THE FLOODWATERS ARE GOING TO GO ANYWAY. That's where they have went before and no matter where the dikes break or even if by some miracle the dikes would hold, that's where the floodwaters are going to go again. Besides mankinds encroachment into the area nothing has altered the fact of where the floodwaters will flow. Areas that were covered with water in 1909 will be covered with water again except this time because of the encroachment of man (irresponsible land use planning), the water in some places will be deeper and swifter. Taking all the dams and dikes and levees in place into consideration during major flooding events, conditions now are really much worse than they were in 1909.

Which brings me to my next topic; FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT. Until the Flood Control Committee or some other government agency actually builds the BURLINGTON BYPASS the only thing available to the people of Skagit County is FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT. This is nothing more than an exercise in common sense. A philosophy based on EXISTING CONDITIONS setting the necessary restrictions and regulations. There are those in this county that feel FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT is a violation of their private property rights. The irony here is that based on the principle of no one has the right to flood another's property, FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT is the strongest supporter of private property rights. Skagit County, namely the diking districts and the cities of Burlington and Mt Vernon have had terrible landuse records. Case in point; Burlington's promotion of a regional shopping center and soliciting of state funds for the widening of Garl Street to five lanes in an IDENTIFIED FLOOD FLOW PATH OF A MINIMUM OF 61,000 CFS. To allow that kind of irresponsible construction in such an easily identifiable FLOODWAY can only serve to further endanger existing residents. Just because the Burlington City Council has sold out the safety of their residents is no reason that the Flood Control Committee should sit on the sidelines and allow the Samish River farming community to receive the bulk of the 130,000 overflow, which would be the ultimate end result.

Jess, I hate to say this, but it is what I personally feel. With the exception of the 20,000 dollars appropriated for the expansion of the Flood Early Warning System (of which nothing has been done with yet), and the initiating of the process for log jam removal (of which nothing has been done yet), the Flood Control Committee has been a failure to the people of Skagit County.

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This must not be allowed to continue. There is just too much at stake. The majority of the residents of our valley have been lulled into a terrible sense of false security. Admittedly the dams and dikes on the Skagit have contributed greatly to reducing the high frequency floods. But they will only hold so much water, until the dams will have to be opened and the levees fail. Flood Control for the serious flooding events (anything more serious than the 1975 14 year flood) has been a failure.

Unless strict FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT measures are instituted and followed to the letter we are inviting and in some cases creating, disaster. Perhaps the Flood Control Committee should seriously consider restructuring and redefining its purpose. I personally feel that the committee should not under any circumstances dissolve itself but perhaps new blood wouldn't hurt. Liaisons with legislative committees and government agencies should be set up immediately, on a local, county, state and federal level. The Flood Control Committee should be completely independent of any urban or public works department influence. Some areas are more dangerous than others. These should be identified by the committee and management recommendations based on existing conditions made to the governing authority.

Unless this is done by June of next year I feel that Skagit County Sub Flood Control Zones, Diking Districts, and urban areas will not be allowed to participate in the 4 million dollar matching funds appropriated by the state legislature to be made available in June of 1985.

Jess, because of my involvement I have created extensive files on the many flood related issues facing our county. Just because I have moved out of the Nookachamps and can no longer serve on the Flood Control Committee does not in any way mean that I am going to stop my efforts to bring about good, sensible, much needed FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT measures to Skagit County. If I can be of any assistance to you or any future Flood Control Committee please do not hesitate to call me. My files are always open to the committee, the County Commissioners, or for that matter any public entity that so desires the information.

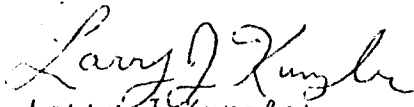
It has been both an honor and a privilege and most definitely one hell of a learning experience for me to have served on the Skagit County Flood Control Advisory Committee.

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I would like to leave you with the words of a local newspaper editorial board. "In the years of 1906, 1909, 1917 and 1921, all within the lifetime of many residents, the mighty Skagit has approached floods of 100 year flood frequency...Floods of this magnitude have catastrophic effect, wreaking tremendous damage on Skagit County and resulting in large scale loss of property and probably loss of life. ... Flood specialist have termed the Skagit River "a disaster waiting to happen." ...If a major flood occurs, we will pay a cost almost beyond our present imagination. It will be a price we can ill afford."

Jess, I am in total agreement with the above statement with the exception of the word "IF". It should be WHEN.

Respectively submitted;


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cc: Skagit County Commissioners