

# Letters

3-27-84

## Inaction invites flooding disaster

Dear Editor:

An open letter to Jess Knutzen, chairman of the Skagit County Flood Control Advisory Committee.

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 Mount 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 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.

In my opinion, the bypass is the only flood control option that will ever be implemented in Skagit County.

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. Sixty-seven percent 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.

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.

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.

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 and 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.

The main justification for building the Burlington bypass is that, that's 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 mankind's 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 option available to the people of Skagit County is floodplain management.

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 that 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 Mount Vernon have had terrible land use 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.

Jess, I hate to say this, but it is what I personally feel. With the exception of the \$20,000 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.

Unless strict floodplain management measures are instituted and followed to the letter we are inviting and in some cases creating, disaster.

LARRY J. KUNZLER,  
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1-2