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Skagit River Washing Away Lytle's Burlington Farm

(From Bellingham Herald)

Dropping off with loud splashes as the swirling waters dig deeper and deeper into the lower sand pocket is the land on the Austin Lytle farm about one and one half miles east of Burlington in Skagit county.

Since last fall's heavy rains and the winter's heavy snow fall, the Skagit river has washed out more than 15 of his original 45 acres of fertile top soil, and Lytle, estimating conservatively said last week that at the same rate his house, now about 200 feet from the river, would be gone by Christmas.

Taking no chances and pinning no hope on aid from the county or state, he has given up farming as his main occupation to take a job in Burlington and will farm his land only as a hobby. He's sold his chicken coop and big barn both closer to the river than the house, and soon will move the house "into town".

The Lytle farm is located at the bottom of a sharp U bend known as the "Burlington bend," in a similar position to the Ray Syre farm, which was being washed away by the Nooksack River near Lawrence during last fall's storms.

"The river's near its low depth for the year," Farmer Lytle said as he watched salmon jump in the stream as it swirled past at a 6 mile per hour rate. Just then several large bits of dirt and sand broke away and washed down the river.

Lytle, who with his wife and daughter, Betty, have lived at the farm eight years said that the county engineers have surveyed the river location three times since last fall, with

an eye to dredging across the top of the U and saving the land, but nothing more has been done. However on river control work, the county is putting in rock revetments at Utopia, some distance east, and has indicated it "might start work on the 'Sterling bend' about one half mile east, this year, but that isn't saving us", the farmer dishearteningly acknowledged. He indicated County Engineer Haljmar Walber and several of the county commissioners had evinced great interest in river control work, but lack of funds was holding up any work.

Army and navy engineers, called in last fall for consultation said that the river would be hard to stop if it washed away the last 1,000 feet to the Dike road. After crossing the Dike road, it would be in an old slough which runs through Burlington and out to the city hospital and Darigold plant they said.

The soft sand pocket runs west to the Dike road, the hungry river needing only time before it swallows up hundreds of acres of land.

Harold Halvorson, owning the next farm east of Lytle's has sand silt where he used to graze cattle, the river ruining the ground when it ate away and covered the land.