

2-15-51

Bailing out after a record high water, Skagit county was finding late this week that its losses were not as great as the first frantic press and radio reports indicated.

This could be said in particular as to livestock—possibly 300 head—without minimizing the severity of the water, sand and drift damage to lands and crops and of loss to hard-hit individual farmers.

Will Be "Days" Before Water Goes Down

Hamilton residents were swamping out their homes and stores today in the first-flooded community but in the second, Conway, it was to be a matter of days before there could be hope of relief from overflow waters.

The flood-breeding combination of a Chinook wind and heavy, warm rains last Thursday night set the Skagit river off on its 1951 rampage. By Sunday morning it had risen to what the county engineer's of-

fice said was an all-time high of 28.2 feet in Mount Vernon, as against the previous, November 1949, record of 26.05.

WORSE AT CONWAY IN '21

Conway residents declared the 1951 flood was two feet, ten inches below the 1921 inundation in their community, due probably to the fact that this time the Fisher's slough dikes broke southward before the South Fork river dikes gave way.

THOUSANDS HELP ON DIKES

That greater losses were not sustained was due in large part to valiant efforts of thousands of volunteer workers who patrolled and sandbagged dikes throughout Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Bolstered Sunday by Whidbey Naval Air station navy men, Fort Lewis army engineer units, and national guardsmen, these forces kept the dikes of the critical Riverside and Burlington Bend areas virtually intact, staved off gravely-threatening break-throughs along the north banks of the North Fork.

"CLOSE CALL" IN CITY

In Mount Vernon Saturday night Main street was sandbagged when the water crept to within six inches of spilling over into the business district, 7000 sandbags were piled on the dikes and bottoms around the sewage disposal plant, and overflowing waters were dammed off with sacks on the West Side. Anacortes policemen and Mayor Joe Hagan came over to help.

15,000 ACRES COVERED

A total of 10,000 acres south of Mount Vernon and 500 in the Nookchamps and upriver were inundated, Harold Strombom flood-fighting coordinator for the county estimated. Fir Island between the South Fork and Dry Slough, however, escaped serious flooding, but waters from the Conway breaks flowed eastward to the foothills

and northward to within two miles of Mount Vernon.

REBUILDING HELP SOUGHT

Seeking help in rebuilding dikes, diking district commissioners went to Seattle Wednesday and obtained a promise from US engineers and state officials of conferences on the spot here next week to discuss steps to be taken.

HIGHWAY STILL CLOSED

It may be a week to ten days, at least, before draining of the great basin south of Mount Vernon, that has the Pacific highway blocked, may be hoped for, old-timers and county officials agreed. No one seemed to have any definite idea as to how the draining could be accomplished as far as any direct steps were concerned.

BUILDINGS LOST

In terms of losses, the flood cost one substantial house, that on the George Moore place just below the North Fork bridge, farm buildings there, a granary on the Von Moos place—it drifted out into the Sound—and numerous smaller buildings, including collapsed garages and chicken houses in Conway.

WATER SYSTEMS HIT

Conway lost its water system when the submarine main crossing the South Fork to serve island farms broke. Divers Tuesday were hunting for the broken mainland end of the line to plug it and permit resumption of water service to the town.

The PUD resorted to pumping and filtering river water when flood waters bared its 14-inch high-pressure "mountain water" main on the Doliar road between Sedro Woolley and Burlington Sunday. The line burst, speeding the wash-out of one road lane for a distance of 1000 feet. A settling PictSweet cannery wall that broke a six-inch water line in Mount Vernon

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Conway, Hiway 99
Still Under Water

LOSSES LOW IN RECORD FLOOD

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further reduced pressure here Sunday night. Temporary repairs to the Dollar road line were completed Wednesday.

DOLLAR ROAD OPEN SOON

The Dollar road will be reopened by this weekend, Strombom predicted. The road above Hamilton was reopened Tuesday night.

2 BRIDGES WRECKED

Other county road department losses included the 160-foot Freshwater Slough bridge on Anderson island below Conway, a buckled new bridge to Cockerham island near Lyman, washes and heavy debris on Francis road in the Nookachamps, due to be cleared today; a shear wall on the North Fork bridge, both draw rests on the South Fork bridge.

CONCRETE FERRY RETRIEVED

The Concrete ferry, washed away Saturday, was found and towed back Wednesday. With a new deckhouse, it will be back in service this weekend. Faber ferry may remain closed another day or two while a mud slide is being cleared on the south side.

There were numerous small washouts on the new South Skagit highway but the road was open throughout, one-lane at some spots.

One small county bridge floated to the Sound, was taken in tow and tied up there, but can not be brought back upriver.

Also down the Skagit "drain" went several large oil and gasoline tanks, from immediately north of Mount Vernon.

TELLESBO FARM HARD HIT

Reports to the county engineer's office Wednesday were that the Joe Tellesbo farm, between Brown's and Dry sloughs, was ruined, by sand, logs and gullies. It was reputedly one of the best pieces of farm land in the county.

NO LOSS ESTIMATE YET

Any dollar estimate of the flood's damage could be no more than a "wild guess," competent judges declared.

"FARMERS WILL COME BACK"

As far as the flood's effect on the county's economy, it will be felt, but Skagit farmers generally find a way around such difficulties and "pull through," H. A. Moldstad, vice-president and manager of the First National Bank of Mount Vernon, said Wednesday. He pointed out that most farmers were little if any in debt and those hit by the flood in most instances would be able to finance themselves on the basis of their net

where winter crops were lost.

MAJOR BREAKS LISTED

Major dike breaks were, in approximate order of happening: Fisher's slough, flooding Milltown, Friday night; North Fork, below Rexville bridge, Saturday morning; North Fork, above bridge, pouring into area between Brown's and Dry slough; others on Brown's slough in Beesner district, sea dike near Von Moos farm and Brown's slough near Charles E. Olson lands; two at and below Conway Sunday morning. One sea dike at least was dynamited to relieve part of the island area.

Reports of other floodings ranged from small isolated incidents to the fantastic, such as the inundation of part of Burlington and the Riverside Bend area. Actually there was only one break in the Burlington bend, that quickly plugged, and none of consequence between Mount Vernon and Burlington. Avon was bothered only by seepage.

FIR ISLAND PROPER ESCAPES

Fir Island between the South Fork and Dry slough escaped any serious flooding and access to the area remained open via the river road from Mount Vernon.