

Big Skagit River Project Abandoned

Office Here Closes After Almost Four Years; Over \$400,000 Unspent; Failure to Maintain Work Means Most of \$260,000 to Be Wasted

On August 25, unless something unforeseen occurs, the Skagit river bank erosion project engineers' office maintained in Sedro-Woolley by the WPA since December, 1935, will be closed, and the \$418,000 appropriated for additional work on the Skagit, will never be spent. Iner Nelson, superintendent of the river work, since its beginning in 1935, has already turned in most of his equipment. About seventy men are concluding the work on the Samish river and all projects here on the Samish and Skagit will be completely stopped by August 25, unless more work is authorized.

The sum of \$418,000 which was appropriated for continuing the work of protecting farms from erosion by the Skagit river, could not be spent because the county commissioners refused to provide equipment they had promised the WPA, and the majority of the farmers fought the plan suggested by the county commissioners, to provide maintenance funds. The county, in agreeing to the big project, had agreed to finance maintenance, according to WPA authorities, but the county commissioners claimed they had no funds available. The resulting deadlock has caused the abandonment of further flood control work on the Skagit, and the loss of the \$418,000 for which the Sedro-Woolley Chamber of Commerce and Congressman Wallgren worked for months.

The original appropriation of \$260,000 was spent in three years of building over four miles of revetments on the Skagit between Lyman and Burlington, at the most dangerous points. The failure of the county to care for the maintenance of these revetments or to prevent damage by log tows has already resulted in loss of much of this work and will cause eventually its almost total loss, according to WPA engineers.

Revetments built have protected Lyman, Burlington and other danger spots on the river. A total of \$40,000 more was spent by the WPA in clearing snags on the river. Of this total of \$300,000 spent in the upper Skagit, about eighty

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percent of the money went for local labor with two hundred and sixty men employed at the peak of the operation.

Lars Langloe, flood control engineer for the state, made the following statements in his report following an inspection of the work which was done:

"There is every probability that reconstruction of those revetments which have failed would be eligible for reconstruction by the WPA and certainly would be included as part of any eventual federal flood control project under the flood control act.

"Of the works already constructed about 2,200 feet or 10 percent has been destroyed and requires 100 percent reconstruction at a probable cost of about \$27,000. Lesser portions of the works have sustained some damages which may be repaired at comparatively small expense. An undetermined percentage of the bank revetments require supplemental planting of willows where the original plantings, for various reasons, failed to grow.

Maintenance Cost

"When and if all works now planned have been constructed, the district, if formed, would have to maintain approximately seven miles of revetments the original cost of which will have been in the neighborhood of \$500,000 (including the cost of reconstructing works which have been totally destroyed).

"The cost of maintaining brush mat and fascine revetments is uncertain, since no one has attempted to maintain any of the works so far constructed. Where any material damage has occurred, it has been left unattended. We do not know that on all streams, except on the Skagit, damage so far sustained has been merely nominal. On the Skagit most, if not all, of the damage has been caused by log rafts and unless some measure is taken to compel tug boat companies to keep rafts from tearing out mats and fascines further construction of revetments, whether they be made of brush or rock is a waste of money. It is believed that under our statutes (Rem. Rev. Stat. Sec. 1182) tug boat companies can be held responsible for any damage they do.

"If these revetments function according to plans, and there is no reason to doubt that they will maintenance costs should decrease with the years, since live willows form the permanent protection.

"Under reasonably favorable circumstances, assuming that measures are taken to prevent destruction by log rafts and that maintenance is timely and expertly performed, I would place the initial annual maintenance, operating and over head cost of the prospective district at not less than 2½ percent of the initial \$500,000 construction cost, or say \$12,500. After a period of careful maintenance, and barring unpredictable catastrophies the average cost should become less, possibly as low as \$6,000 per year."