

Panel Named to Seek Federal, State Help for River Channel



ENGINEER SPEAKS—Skagit County Engineer H. O. Wallberg rose to his feet yesterday to describe the river situation to an emergency meeting of the Skagit County Flood Control Council yesterday afternoon. At his left is County Commissioner Lowell Hughes. Others in the front row at his right are Harold Strombom, assistant County Engineer; Bert Heggen; Harvey J. Davis, manager Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce and Pete Lee of Dike District Three.

Increased Traffic Sought

Old man river, stay away from my door.

That was the theme of yesterday's meeting of the Skagit County Flood Control Council in the Skagit County Courthouse.

Over 50 persons, including representatives from 11 diking districts in Skagit County, were packed into the small courtroom to discuss the possibility of creating a new channel for the mouth of the silt-choked north fork of the Skagit River.

Up-shot of the hour and a half meeting was a unanimous resolution by the council to support an emergency program with state and federal powers to dredge the new channel.

Committee Named

A five-man committee was appointed by president of the council, Earl Hanson, to carry the message of the river threat to the proper authorities. The members are Lowell Hughes, chairman; Nobel Lee, Leo Beckley, Jim Dunlap and Hanson.

A proposal to cut the new channel from Valentine's Bend proceeding westerly past Bald Island to deep water was the main topic of discussion.

Captain Art Spencer of the riverboat Skagit Belle pointed out that the river is trying to

the rate of silting of the north fork mouth was growing steadily worse for navigation purposes.

"We used to be able to enter drawing 5 feet 8 inches. Now we can't get into the river drawing 5 feet," Captain Spencer commented.

LaConner area farmer Jim Hulbert said that the effect of the heavy silting was to raise the level of the mouth of the river which then backed the water upriver endangering low-lying farmland.

Floods Costly

"If we don't get a channel that carries that mud out to sea it will continue to pile right back up the Skagit. The cost of having that channel dredged would be nothing compared to the cost of a good sized flood," declared Hulbert.

Chairman Hanson noted that the water level at the river's mouth during the Nov. 3-5 flood was as high with a 25-foot level at Mount Vernon as it was in the more serious flood in 1951 when the Mount Vernon reading was 28 feet.

County Engineer H. O. Walberg told the group that they must be willing to back the emergency project with matching funds from their dike districts if they are to receive state and federal aid.

"This new channel won't be a complete panacea for our river troubles but it should certainly help to lower the water level," Walberg said.

Several of those at the meeting noted that the same idea had been proposed to the Army Corps of Engineers after the 1951 flood.

Hughes Speaks

"If we are going to get anything done we have got to be of one mind and get on the ball and get this thing rolling," said County Commissioner Lowell Hughes, who is a Fir Island farmer himself.

Two old-timers from LaConner pointed out on aerial photo maps supplied by the soil conservation office that it might be better to run a new channel in a more northerly direction towards Dugualla Bay.

"That's something we can let the army engineers decide," replied Hulbert.

State Senator Paul N. Luvera who attended the meeting said: "I'm here to help you. Just tell me what you want done and I'll work with you to get it done."

A Roll Call

A roll call of dike district rep-

resentatives as well as board meetings could be held by their commissioners for official action.

County Commissioner Hughes said he already had talked to Congressman Jack Westland and said it would be the aim of the committee to get an emergency appropriation from Congress to get the job done.

"We need immediate action. There is no question about it, something has to be done about the north fork if we are to protect our farms and homes," he said.