

Plan restudied

Avon canal to control river level

A long-considered flood control project is undergoing new study in the Skagit Valley as probably the most practical means of curbing damage and offering a number of other advantages.

The project is the Avon Bypass — first authorized in 1936, frequently discussed since then and now revived by the United States Corps of Army Engineers as the most practicable solution to Skagit River Flood problems.

Skagit County Commissioners and a special Avon Bypass Committee are currently studying the proposed project. A Congressional appropriation would be necessary to provide initial funds for the project.

RIVER TO BAY

As outlined today by the Skagit County Engineering Department, the bypass would consist of a channel 340 feet wide at its bottom extending from the Skagit River to Padilla Bay. Excess flood waters could be diverted into the channel during high water and emptied into the bay.

In addition to providing flood control, the proposed bypass also could offer advantages as a recreational site, Lloyd H. Johnson, Skagit County Flood Control Coordinator, told the Herald.

Fishing, boating, swimming and water skiing all would be possible along its length from the central Skagit Valley to Padilla Bay, Johnson said.

The bypass could as well provide uses in fish farming, drainage, irrigation and water transporta-

tion of the project however. Army Engineers would direct the work.

Funds provided by local interests would come from Skagit County, the state, diking districts and possible flood control zones, according to a 1961 state legislative action.

At the point where it begins in the central Valley, the proposed Avon Bypass would utilize part of the existing Gage's Slough, located south of Burlington.

WESTWARD ROUTE

It would move westward then past Highway 99 toward a Great Northern Railway Burlington-Anacortes right of way. Crossing the right of way near the Avon-Allen Road, it would parallel the tracks on the north to a point behind the Fredonia Grange Hall where it would swing northward toward Bay View and its link with Padilla Bay.

Control gates would be installed at the eastern and western ends of the bypass, Johnson said.

The flood official explained that the bypass will give much greater flood protection to the area west of Sedro-Woolley. He noted indirect benefits to areas outside the Skagit River flood plain, including protection of the Anacortes water system, which supplies two refineries, the Whidbey Island Naval Base and LaConner.

"Businesses on Fidalgo Island, Bay View Hill and most other parts of Skagit County would be brought to a standstill by a large flood," Johnson said.

GROUP APPOINTED

The Avon Bypass Committee.

in the vicinity of Burlington," the Army Engineers' statement disclosed.

Another major revision in location has made the utilization of Gage's Slough possible and the following of a hillside north of the valley so that only a minimum of valuable farmland will be required to provide an area for the channel.

Most of the land which must be obtained for the channel is marginal property, Johnson told the Herald. Total land area covered by the proposed bypass is 725 acres.

Army Engineers disclosed today that the existing Skagit River levee system provides protection from floods which might conceivably occur every ten years. The bypass will offer protection from the so-called 30-year floods — considered much more damaging in scope.

AID CITED

"For the 1951 flood the Bypass would have lowered flood stages three to five feet in the Skagit River and two to four feet in the North and South Forks of the Skagit River," the Engineers noted.

The 1951 flood is frequently cited as the most damaging in the Skagit Valley during recent years.

The current study began several months ago at a meeting held between the Army Engineers and the Skagit County Flood Control Council.

The bypass could as well provide uses in fish farming, drainage, irrigation and water transportation, Johnson explained. The flood control aide is in fact in Olympia today discussing with fisheries officials the possibility of establishing a hatchery in part of the proposed channel.

\$19 MILLION

Cost of the bypass will be about \$19 million. Federal aid would provide about \$15 million of this total. Average annual benefits from the project are estimated by Army Engineers at \$1 million.

Local interests must furnish right of way costs and pay for the construction of highway bridges made necessary by the project, Johnson noted. Federal funds are available for the bulk

GROUP APPOINTED

The Avon Bypass Committee, appointed by Earl Hanson, Skagit County Flood Control Council president, consists of Geroge Dynes, chairman, and Dike District No. 20 commissioner; Tom Shane, Dike District No. One commissioner; Nobe Lee, Dike District No. One Commissioner, and Johnson, who is its secretary.

Johnson said reaction thus far to the project has largely been favorable.

The Avon Bypass originally was authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1936 as a structure that could direct flood waters from the Skagit River to Padilla Bay.

It was not however constructed then because local interests could not provide necessary funds.

Since that time, it has been frequently discussed on an unofficial basis.

CHANNEL DEEPER

The Army Engineers' most recent study, leading to the current proposal, has revised the bypass design to provide for a deep, narrow channel requiring less land and shorter bridges. Such revisions have been made possible by increased capacity in the Skagit River through levee and channel improvement work.

The intake to the channel has been moved for the current project about three miles upstream from a previous location at Avon to above the Great Northern Railway crossing.

"This location will provide increased protection for the area