

Conservation group asks exclusion of Skagit as Wild River

Mr. Harold Chriswell, Supervisor
Mount Baker National Forest
United States Forest Service
Federal Building
Bellingham, Washington 98225

Dear Mr. Chriswell:

The Supervisors of the Skagit Soil and Water Conservation District have considered the provisions of Public Law 90-542 which provides for a National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. We understand that your office, as representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture, will be heading the team which will be studying the Skagit.

We question whether the segments of the Skagit River and its tributaries as proposed for study in the Act, meet the requirements as specified in the Act. The main stream of the Skagit from Bacon Creek to Mount Vernon is not a free-flowing river since its flow is affected by the existing Skagit River dams. The Skagit from above Concrete to Mount Vernon flows through alluvial soils which to a large degree have been cleared and are being used for agriculture or have been or are being developed for recreational homesites.

More than 100 miles of the Skagit and its tributaries which are proposed for study are adjoined by private or non-federal lands lying within the Skagit SWCD. The Act provides that up to 100 acres per mile, adjacent to the river, could be acquired to effectuate the purposes of the Act. It would appear that the cost of any substantial land purchase might be disproportionate to the scenic values that might accrue.

Those portions of the tributaries which flow through the forested areas and especially those portions within the National Forest would seem to more nearly fit the Wild and Free-flowing River concept. Could not the Forest Service manage them with this objective in mind without the necessity of making them a part of the Wild River System?

We are cognizant of the importance of the Skagit as a steelhead and salmon fishing stream and we are sure this reputation will continue under the guidance of the Washington State Departments of Game and Fisheries. These departments are applying scientific propagation and management methods to safeguard and enhance this important resource.

We are also aware of the beauties of the mountain and forest scenery of the North Cascades, a substantial acreage of which lies in Skagit County. The Ross Lake Recreation Area, the North Cascades National Park and the Wilderness and Recreational Areas administered by the Forest Service should provide the necessary opportunity for people from throughout the United States and other countries to enjoy the beauties which we may tend to take for granted.

The control of riverbank erosion was one of the important considerations which led to the formation of Skagit SWCD in 1942. Previously in the 1930s, Corps of Engineers had carried out extensive stabilization work on the river above Sedro-Woolley. Substantial cropland has been lost to the river since that time in spite of efforts of landowners, the County, and State to protect the most critical areas. Upstream soil losses contribute greatly to downstream siltation and pollution and threaten the agricultural lands of the Skagit Delta and the success of the industries and businesses which the agriculture supports.

We believe that the provisions of the Wild Rivers Act would make it difficult, if not impossible, to control the bank erosion and otherwise construct dikes and other flood control works.

We further believe that the disadvantages of including the Skagit as described in 90-542 would outweigh the advantages. The Skagit has provided the soil which had made our farming area famous and we are in need of help to protect it from erosion and flood damage rather than to make that protection more difficult.

Will you see that this communication gets into the proper channels so that it will be considered as the study progresses.

Skagit Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors
Robert J. Hulbert, chairman; James Solseth, vice-chairman; Lyle Wesen, secretary-treasurer; Arthur L. Johnson, member, and Floyd Nelson, member.