

Need of River Improvement For Deep Water Navigation Becomes Growing Necessity

As to the character of the improvement desired, we may say in general that we want free and unimpeded access to the sea, in order that our rapidly increasing commerce may fully enjoy the advantages which our location very near salt water should give us. We are working locally on a plan and we hope in the near future to employ some engineer of national prominence who will make a thorough study of the Skagit River as a whole and submit to us a comprehensive plan for flood control and improvement and stabilization of navigation of the river. These two features of river work seem to us to be closely inter-related.

We are a community of farmers and have not the skill or knowledge of hydraulic engineers. What we suggest therefore, in the absence of expert determination, is a result of our experience with the Skagit River for the past twenty-five years.

The stoppage to navigation is caused by the formation of bars and the lodging of snags either at the mouth of the stream or along its source higher up. These same causes raise the bed of the stream and dam up the water during flood, increasing the high water menace. It seems to us therefore, that a free and open channel to the sea as well as the lessening of flood danger would both be accomplished by the prosecution of three general lines of work.

First, beginning at deep salt water, two rock jetties should be built to the mouth of the river. This will so confine and direct the current that the river will keep this part of its channel scoured. One jetty would not seem to accomplish this, since on emerging from the mouth of the river, the stream would spread out fan shaped at once over the mud flats and deposit its load of silt before reaching deep water.

The second line of work must consist of removing the accumulations which now obstruct navigation. The silt at the mouth and on the bars should, as far as possible, be placed on the banks of the river. Here it will be of use in flood control; while it would merely form a further menace to navigation, if it were flushed on down the stream. The snags and logs should also be removed, since every one of these left in the stream bed is a foundation for a bar. These snags and logs should not be sent on down the river, where they are likely to give further trouble; but they should be accumulated at points on the bank where they can ultimately be burned.

The third line of work should be directed toward lessening the burden of silt and drift carried by the river. We say lessening, for it is practically impossible to remove it all. This line of work is evidently very necessary since with a once open channel it would be much more difficult to maintain this with water heavily laden with silt than with water less heavily laden. It is also evident that this burden of silt could be reduced materially by protecting the points along the bends where the river is constantly eroding its banks. This work of bank protection to prevent erosion, and therefore filling up of channel, is quite as important to the navigation of the stream as the first opening of the channel itself.

As to the relative importance of the north fork and south fork, there is no difference between them as to the chief commerce of the valley. The communities of Fir and Milltown are on the south fork and could not be reached by boat if only the north fork were improved. We call your attention, however, to the fact that the north fork has a short course and steep gradient to salt water; while the south fork has a long course and flat gradient to salt water. From the mouth of the south fork to deep salt water it is five or six miles over mud flats, while from the mouth of the north fork it is less than two miles to deep salt water.

To date all improvements have been with the idea of flood control alone. Thus there has been expended up to the year 1922, but not including that year, the sum of \$1,987,799.10 for dikes and drainage ditches. These dikes have not attained the object for which they were built as during each flood of any magnitude they fail to confine the stream and are broken in numerous places.

Since the 1921 flood there has been some attempt made to take up this river problem along comprehensive lines covering both phases. There is at present a considerable sentiment among the residents and tax-payers of Skagit County in favor of forming an improvement district covering all the territory threatened by the river, and adopting some plan for dredging and widening the channel as well as putting

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borne in mind that the Skagit River Delta is one of the most prolific farming sections in the entire United States. Every farm along the back of the river has its own tonnage of hay, grain, potatoes and all varieties of farm products and upon investigation into the reports of commercial agencies and others as to crop production of this valley we find that the aggregate tonnage is enormous. Most of this tonnage is shipped to various points on Puget Sound and British Columbia via the river route.

A very conservative estimate of farm production over a period of years indicates that approximately 50,000 tons of oats, 30,000 tons of hay, 12,000 tons of potatoes, 18,000 tons of straw, and 10,000 tons of general farm products originate in this valley annually. These figures are compiled from governmental and commercial estimates and will approximate an average annual yield. An increasingly large amount of this tonnage is true being handled on the river every year and it is a fact that if the lower river were cleared of obstructions and an adequate depth of water provided over the bars at low tide, this commerce would practically all be handled by river shipment.

A fact supplementary to the figures above given is the record of the bridge tenders on the highway draw above Mount Vernon. Over the same period as covered by the paragraph above the draw has opened some 1773 times per year. This is for freight steamers alone as there is no passenger traffic on the river above Mount Vernon. Even accepting nominal figures of 250 tons for each cargo so passed it will be seen that there is an exceedingly heavy traffic passing this point.

Of the manufacturing establishments listed above, the following use the established freight lines of the Skagit River Navigation & Trading Company: Fisher Flouring Mills Co., Carnation Milk Products Co., Skagit County Dairymen's Ass'n, 2 plants; Skagit Feed Co., Q. & Q. Warehouse Company, Standard Oil Company, Union Oil Company, Shell Oil Company, Skagit Steel & Iron Works, City Grain & Seed Co., C. H. Lilly & Company.

The Navigation Company's records for the year 1922 as presented to the United States Government show a total tonnage in and out of 109,200. This has increased since the year 1913 more than 300 per cent despite the handicap of the bars in the lower river. The values of commodities shipped are given in detail in the report the company makes to the U. S. Department of Commerce, a copy of which report we attach hereto. On the one item of condensed milk alone the value of the product shipped runs to more than \$2,000,000.00. Other milk products in-

when the market on potatoes is so low the fact that a rate of 5c a hundred can be secured is extremely advantageous to producer and consumer alike.

TIMBER SHIPMENTS

The bulk of the shipments of timber and timber products originating in the Skagit Valley are handled by the boats of the Puget Sound & Baker River Railway Co. This concern takes care of the business of the following: English Logging Company, Dempsey Lumber Company, Hamilton Logging Company, Moore Logging Company.

The official statement of the annual transactions of this company will be attached hereto, and taking this into consideration and the additional shipments of the independent operators located in this territory, it will be found that the annual timber shipments approach the imposing figure of 300,000,000 feet. The company mentioned above also handles large quantities of other commodities, an estimate of which business shows a volume of somewhat more than 50,000 tons per annum. This includes machinery and supplies shipped into the logging camps.

PROSPECTIVE DEVELOPMENTS

As the waterborne commerce of this valley has been increasing consistently from year to year in the natural course of events, it is reasonable to presume that this rate of increase will be maintained. However, there is one prospective development of the near future that is worthy of especial consideration on account of the magnitude of the industry involved. For several seasons the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company has been conducting experiments in the Skagit Valley with the idea of installing a sugar beet refinery in the Valley should results in growing the beets warrant. During the past season this Club worked in co-operation with the company and arranged for the planting of experimental plots of beets in various parts of the district. Results have been so satisfactory that the company is at this time engaged in signing up contracts with growers for a very considerable acreage of beets for the coming summer. These beets are to be shipped to the Yakima Valley refineries but it is anticipated that before the 1924 harvest is ready a plant will be in operation in the Skagit Valley at some point along the Skagit River. From statistics furnished us by the company we find that the proposed plant will create a traffic of more than 200 tons per day. One of the great factors which determined the location of the plant is the possibility of water shipment direct to the distributing centers of the Northwest. The Mount Vernon Commercial Club has taken an active part in the experimental work so far done in this direction and anticipates wonderful benefits to the whole northern Puget Sound re-

finery uses more than 50 tons of this rock per day it can be easily estimated what a tremendous saving boat delivery of this raw material direct to the plant will mean; there should also be considered the benefit to the producers in opening up a new outlet for their product.

SAVINGS ON ACCOUNT OF WATERBORNE RATES

From the figures heretofore given as to volume of tonnage which can all be verified by examination of governmental and commercial reports, it will be seen that an enormous saving is apparent in the use of the Skagit River for freight traffic. Taking the business of the Skagit River Navigation company alone as a basis for comparison we find the difference in rail and water rates to be tremendous. The steamer traffic is from 10 to 20 cents per hundred with even lower rates on certain commodities in quantity. The railroad rates start at 34 cents for the lowest classification and run to 68 cents per hundred on the higher classifications. Taking the tonnage by this company for the year 1922, 109,200, as a basis, a saving can be shown to the people of Skagit county of more than \$250,000.00 per annum. Add to this the saving in towage of logs as opposed to rail shipment, the direct handling of heavy and bulky commodity shipments to British Columbia ports, and the half score of independent freighters constantly operating in and out of the river, and the figures rise to an almost unbelievable total. We regret that we have not been able to secure the reports of the "Trader" and "Selkirk" line to British Columbia but it should be realized that these two boats represent a traffic that is in its infancy and one capable of great development.

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NAVIGATION NOW DIFFICULT

It is a matter of common knowledge that the Skagit is one of the great commercial waterways of the Northwest. A contemplation of the figures given will show this assertion to be based on a firm foundation of concrete facts. The fact that this remarkable commerce has developed despite the obstacles of bars and constructions in the lower river in evidence that if free access to this channel could be had at all stages of the tide a still more remarkable development would certainly take place.

But it is also a fact and a matter of common knowledge that the entrance to this waterway is rapidly becoming blocked by bars and obstructions so that at the present rate of filling a very few more years will see the South Fork of the river entirely closed to navigation. Capt. F. A. Siegel of the U. S. Snagboat "Swinomish" has filed a statement with the Board of County Commissioners of Skagit County in which he alleges that twenty-nine years ago when he started to navigate the river it was difficult to find bottom with a pike pole at any point in the South Fork between Mount Vernon and Puget Sound. The bottom of the river has now filled to such an extent that at low tide only small boats or skiffs can travel the channel. There has apparently been a filling in for almost the entire length of the South Fork of some 16 to 18 feet. This condition can only be remedied by dredging.

It is self evident that unless steps are taken in the near future to remedy conditions the use of the South Fork of the Skagit River will have to be abandoned as far as navigation of vessels of a size greater than launches is concerned. Such an abandonment would work an irreparable disaster to the industrial development of the Skagit Valley. Situated on the South Fork are the mill plants of the Victoria Mill Co., the Hawley Mill Company, the M. N. Hawley & Co., and the English Logging Company. The entire output of the English Company from its Lake Cavanaugh line would be hemmed in. The plants listed above give employment to more than 500 men. The value of their output exceeds a quarter of a million per month. It would be a calamity that would be felt by the entire valley should their operations be curtailed to any considerable extent.

We believe that the facts hereinbefore set forth will fully substantiate the claims that we make as to the importance of the Skagit River as one of our great commercial waterways. The fact that waterborne commerce has increased from year to year as shown by a comparison of the statements of the navigation and manufacturing companies, is ample evidence in support of our contention that this district is only in the infancy of its possible development. The further fact that every person who can speak with authority as to conditions of navigation on the river, states unequivocally that unless radical remedial measures are taken within a very few years the

EDITORIAL COMMENT

At the hearing held by the United States engineering staff at the Commercial Club rooms last Friday, much data was submitted showing why the Skagit river should be improved.

The data apparently was definite and answered all the questions submitted by the department. But this is not all and every person interested in the future of this valley, of Skagit county and of the usefulness of the old Skagit river, should bear in mind that the mere taking of information or data by the United States engineering department means little when it comes to getting actual results. Past experiences have shown exclusively that it takes a long time to get that little ball of red tape unwound, and then when it is unwound, so much of the financial aid which is supposed to mean so much is generally spent in minor red tape details, that the actual amount is reduced to such an extent that it is of little or no particular use; at any rate it becomes so reduced that the amount left is of little or no consequence.

To the thinking person, it becomes apparent that the expenditure of ten or twenty thousand dollars will avail nothing. The people of this county want substantial results. To get these substantial results, the meeting of last Friday must be followed up with a whip hand. Seattle must be shown that the river should be improved and made a deep water navigable stream. Seattle must get behind the project and help to make it of value to Seattle, and thus open a way to get the thousands and thousands of tons of produce and freight going through the Seattle port and her port facilities will greatly profit by this improvement. Capt. McDonald states that there is enough freight coming in and going out of this valley to justify a daily boat service, providing the river were made useful as a deep water stream.

Every effort must be put forth to keep the matter alive and in the minds of the war department. The representatives in Washington must be made to understand that this valley needs this improvement and that something must be done, something worth while and something permanent.

The Daily Herald herewith reproduces extracts from the volume of data submitted at the hearing last Friday. It is important information and shows conclusively that the improvement of the Skagit river is an absolute necessity.