

SKAGIT FLOOD DANGER TOLD AT CONFERENCE

SEVENTY ATTEND ANNUAL
CONFERENCE IN THIS CITY;
SPEAKERS STRESS NEED
FOR EQUALIZED TAX

With a number of speakers stressing the fact that the citizens of the state of Washington must join forces as a whole to secure adequate flood control facilities, the fourth annual meeting of the Puget Sound Flood Control council was in session today at the local city hall. Such eminent authorities as Col. H. J. Wilde, United States army engineer; Col. Howard A. Hanson, president of the Puget Sound council; Glen H. Smith, outside construction engineer for the Seattle City Light department; and J. B. Fink, director of the Washington state department of conservation and development, left no doubt in the minds of the seventy delegates and interested listeners present that immediate steps must be taken for state recognition of the danger from floods of Washington rivers and streams, and the loss of life and property damage occurring therefrom.

Mayor C. W. Vaux welcomed the visitors, representing five northwest counties, to the city, and a short response was given by Charles M. Dial of Seattle, representative of the chamber of commerce of that city.

Briefly outlining the work of flood control organizations to date, Col. Howard Hanson, who has served the council efficiently as president for the past year, touched upon many points of interest. His chief appeal to the listeners was to consider the discrepancies in the request of funds, and in the number and size of flood control projects, not only in the state of Washington, but also Oregon and California.

Col. Hanson feels that the state should equalize the cost of flood control throughout the various counties of the state, and should assume the burden of the costs of lands and damages to property in construction work relative to flood control. "The individual counties can then make adequate plans to bear the cost of maintenance of flood control works," Col. Hanson stressed.

The speaker made an interesting statement when he listed the appropriations asked of the federal government by the three Pacific coast states for flood control projects. Washington has requested the sum of \$55,000,000 and Oregon \$102,000,000. The state of California, according to Col. Hanson, "wishes the modest sum of \$486,000,000."

Further pointing out the inequality of distribution of requested funds, Col. Hanson stated that

conditions were all in order for a flood in the proportions of that of 1815, but the rain broke one day early."

If such a flood should occur, all of Sedro-Woolley, Burlington, Hamilton and La Conner would be under water, and most of Mount Vernon. Every farmhouse on the Skagit flats would stand in 7 to 15 feet of water, explained Mr. Smith.

In the report of the survey made in 1923, Mr. Smith further commented, Mr. Stewart recommended that should the Skagit valley area ever get six inches of rain or more in one day, the whole valley would be abandoned without attempting to take any possessions along. He also recommended that dikes twelve feet high be built around the entire city of Burlington.

In his second point, Mr. Smith showed by a series of charts how the City Light project on the Skagit river has materially lessened the danger from floods by its huge reservoir at Diablo. The Baker river reservoir at Concrete also is instrumental in lessening flood danger. The city of Seattle has spent \$25,000,000 on the Skagit power project, and receives 85 per cent of its current therefrom. Thus, the city of Seattle is deeply interested in flood control work in the Skagit valley.

J. B. Fink, director of the Washington department of conservation and development, gave a brief outline on the state flood control plans. Mr. Fink believes, contrary to other speakers on the morning's program, that the only feasible means of raising money for flood control work is through local improvement districts. He explained in detail how flood control districts are organized and maintained, and pledged the assistance of his department in any plans that districts and counties of the state might contemplate.

Kindly contradiction to Mr. Fink's advocacy of local improvement districts for raising funds was made by Col. H. J. Wilde, U. S. army engineer, who stated firmly and conscientiously, "I believe the only way the state of Washington will ever get any real flood control program into action is through statewide taxation to carry on the work of the projects." Col. Wilde discussed the many disastrous eastern floods of the last few years, and stated that taxpayers here, as well as in the communities involved, were paying for flood control in the east and the south.

The speaker explained how flood control projects are started, and stated that due to the many requirements of the law, it takes 2 years or better to start any new flood control project.

He briefly outlined the federal

flood control act of 1936, and pointed out discrepancies in such. Col. Wilde stated that so far he, nor his office, has any idea of how much money will be available for flood control in this state, but that without money, nothing can be started.

"Authorization is not appropriation," Col. Wilde said. "Many people read in the newspapers that congress has authorized such and such, and they expect that work will be started next morning on whatever project is involved. But this is misleading. Congress may 'authorize' a great many things, but actual work cannot be started until congress appropriates the funds. Many projects are authorized, which never receive appropriations."

He touched briefly upon flood control work being done in a small measure by the WPA, with the the county, or L. I. D.'s as sponsors.

(This was discussed in full in the late afternoon program by Walter A. Schwartz, state director of WPA, division of operations).

Ending his short talk, Col. Wilde again reiterated that "I can't see local improvement districts raising funds for flood control. Statewide taxation is the only thing."

Immediately following Col. Wilde's talk, Col. Hanson read a telegram received this morning from Congressman Wallgren which was addressed to the Puget Sound Flood Control council, stating that he will continue his fight at the capitol for funds for flood control and river improvement work in this state.

Before the group adjourned for luncheon, where Prof. R. G. Tyler of the University of Washington was the main speaker, the delegates of the various counties represented held short caucuses.

Flood Control

(Continued from Page One)

river dam project were in error, and that it would be unfair to the impression that they need only raise \$28,000 while Skagit county citizens would have to foot a million dollar bill to secure the same amount of funds for flood control.

"We have spent over three million dollars already," Mr. Thomas said, "and if we secure the money for the Mud river dam, the federal government will not even then be matching the money we have spent for a preliminary campaign for this project."

Col. Hanson was quick to respond with the fact that his figures were taken from the federal government's report that should a grant of three million dollars be made, the taxpayers of that vicinity must meet it with \$28,000. Col. Wilde later backed up Col. Hanson's statement, saying that that sum would have to be actually raised by taxation for the construction of the Mud river dam. However, he did say that Mr. Thomas was entirely correct when he stated that a huge sum of money had already been spent in King and Pierce counties for flood control and for fighting for more adequate funds to carry out their plans and projects.

Following this exchange of opinion, a most enlightening and interesting talk was given by Glen H. Smith, engineer for the Seattle City Light company. His talk dealt with the relation of the City Light project on the upper Skagit river to flood control. He stated that the city of Seattle is in a position to help the Skagit valley by a partial control of destructive floods which periodically sweep the valley.

Mr. Smith brought out the two following points: first, that the Skagit valley is in "very real danger of a flood such as white men have never seen," and secondly, that danger from such destruction can greatly be minimized. Mr. Smith touched briefly upon the floods of 1932, 1921, 1917, 1779 and 1856, but the last real flood, he stated, was in 1815, nearly 120 years ago. In 1923, James Stewart of the U. S. Geological survey set out to make a study of floods of the Skagit river, and with such information as he gathered he discovered that in 1815 a flood occurred in this valley which left layers of river silt in the inner bark of cedar trees on the Skagit flats fifteen feet above the level of the surrounding country. The survey was carried from the mouth of the Skagit river to Ruby Creek, and Mr. Stewart found evidences of big floods all the way. In the Diablo canyon on the upper Skagit are well marked evidences of water having raised to more than a hundred feet above the normal stream elevation.

"I suppose we could work out by the theory of probabilities just how often such a big flood might occur. It may be once every hundred years, or every four hundred," said Mr. Smith, "but the only condition necessary is to get ten inches of rain over the watershed in a period of 34 hours with the temperature above 50 degrees. In 1932 we had 11½ inches of rain but it was spread over a period of 72 hours."