

Channel to Concrete

A new campaign in the continuing war between conservationists and proponents of industrial development is threatening to break out on the Skagit River.

The focus of developing controversy is the proposed dredging of a 100-foot wide channel, six feet deep, to Concrete. The channel would open the river to tug and barge traffic and connect valley towns to salt water.

With a stagnant economy, Skagit County sorely needs to strengthen existing payrolls and to develop new employment opportunities.

Initially the navigable channel would create new activity at Lone Star Cement Company's upriver limestone quarry. Lone Star is anxious to switch from Canadian to Skagit County limestone at its Seattle cement plant. While this is the reason for interest in creating a navigable channel on the Skagit, it is obvious that a navigable waterway through Skagit Valley is an asset that could attract future commerce to this area.

Alarmed that fish spawning grounds will be disturbed, the state Game and Fisheries Department has made an official protest, pointing out that roughly a third of Skagit River's Chinook Salmon are spawned in the area of the proposed dredged channel. Certainly, every effort must be made to develop, not destroy, our fisheries. The complaints of the fishery people must be examined. Effective protection of the Skagit should never be allowed to become a factory or industrial stream, whose waters are charged with manufacturing waste.

Intelligent realization of the importance of clean pure water flowing through an attractive landscape must not be lost from sight in our enthusiasm to develop commerce and industry.

Fortunately, the examples set by others elsewhere in America and Europe clearly demonstrate that river commerce can be entirely compatible with the conservation.

We don't pretend that a dredged channel will not have some small effect on fish spawning despite adequate safeguards. There has to be a reasonable amount of compromise on the part of fish conservationists in order for Skagit County to enjoy vitally necessary economic growth. The conflicts that may seem to exist can most certainly be resolved by calm and constructive approach to the problem by all concerned interests.