

THE COURIER-TIMES

JULY 29, 1943

Soil Engineers Hope to Get Relief For Utopia Erosion

Soil Conservation Service officials, county and state men yesterday studied in detail the erosion problems on the Skagit river between Mount Vernon and the Lyman ferry. D. A. Williams, Soil Conservation Service, assistant regional engineer, expressed optimism as to the immediate relief in some of the most difficult cutting areas on the river. "We don't expect to pull rabbits out of our hat but we do expect to give relief to the immediately endangered farms to the limit of our ability."

After the all-day inspection tour Mr. Williams suggested the following plan of action, for which his local engineers are now collecting the necessary data: First, a short range emergency program at three critical spots on the river, the Utopia bend, at the bend below Utopia at what was the old Buchanan farm and at the head of Skiyou Slough on the present Reece farm. Second, a longer range master plan for coordinated improvement as new critical areas develop. Such a critical area seems to be developing on the last bend of the river before it enters the straight stretch towards the Sedro-Woolley bridge. Here it might prove expedient to change the course of the river back into what is now called Deadman's slough.

The inspection party which made the trip up the river included in addition to Mr. Williams; Paul Dickey, Roy Tuttle, Albert Arnst, and Tom Helseth, of the Soil Conservation Service; Ed Carr, county commissioner; H. Walberg, county engineer, and John Nordmark, State Planning Council. The tug was supplied free of charge by Mr. Parker of Mount Vernon and piloted by the veteran Skagit riverman, Captain Elwell.

Alarming erosion was noted continuously on one side of the river or the other with few exceptions all the way from the Great Northern bridge to Lyman. Of the brush revetment installed five years ago only the job at Lyman has proven itself. A revetment at Utopia has been abandoned by the river while all the other jobs have been undermined along the toe and have completely disintegrated or are beyond repair.

SOIL ENGINEERS HOPE TO GET AID

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creek and into Skiyou slough at an estimated volume in the neighborhood of 100 to 120 second feet. Here Mr. Williams and others concluded that two emergency measures should be taken. First, open a channel on the south bank of the river which would partially relieve the pressure and second stand ready to build a rock dam and revetment at the spot where the river seems to want to shorten its coarse straight across the bend.

3. At the critical area where the Skagit river has ruined the Skiyou slough revetment on the Reece farm, Mr. Williams makes the preliminary suggestion that the remaining rock core on the dike be strengthened with additional rock and that several rock filled jettys be placed to break the force of the eddies which are tearing away the bank at this point.

While the short range emergency program is attempting to relieve the strain at critical points, the Soil Conservation Service engineer, Roy Tuttle, will be completing a study of river movements attempting to set up a master plan for preventive work on the river.

The program outlined yesterday as a result of the tour fits into a master plan for water resources being developed by the County Planning Commission with the technical assistance of the Washington State Planning Council. It is a well known fact that the up-river erosion which seems critical only to the farmers living on the immediate bank of the river is the cause of excessive siltation on the lower stretches of the river where the expensive dikes may soon have to be raised.

The most critical problem areas include the following with suggested engineering:

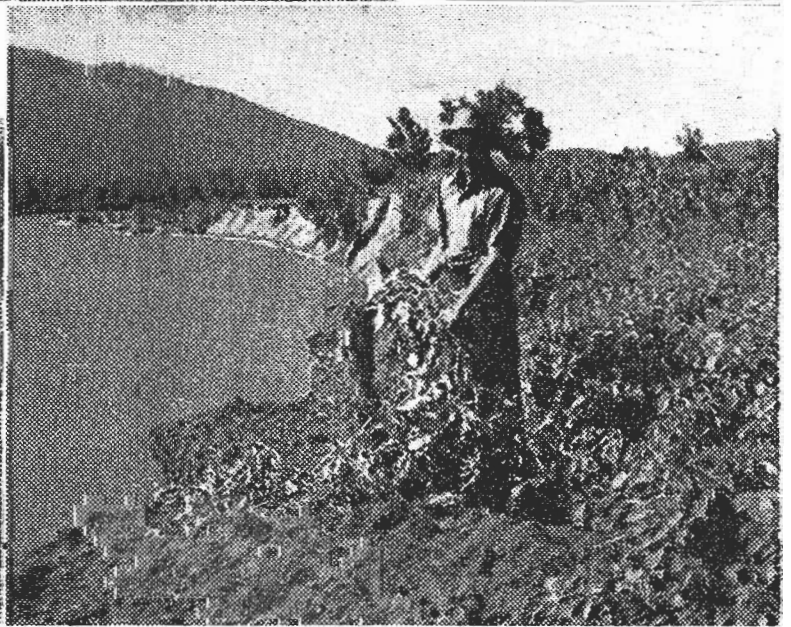
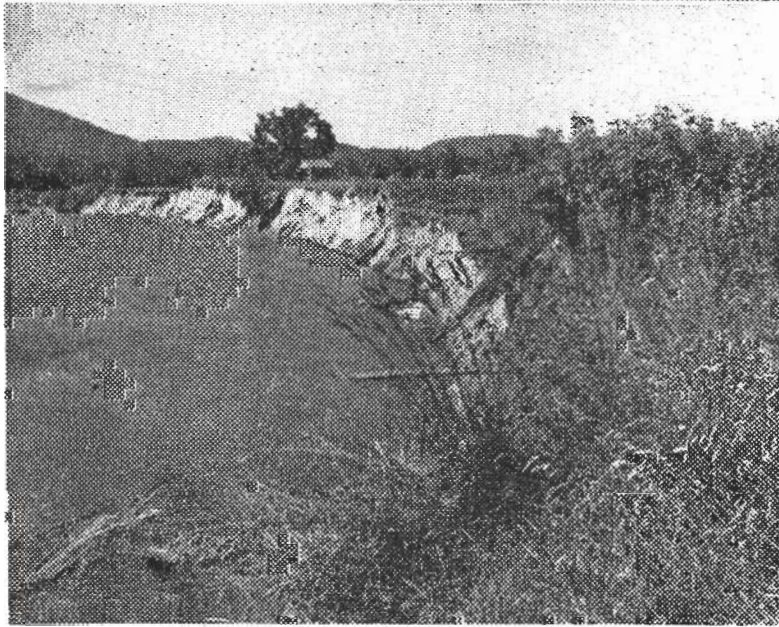
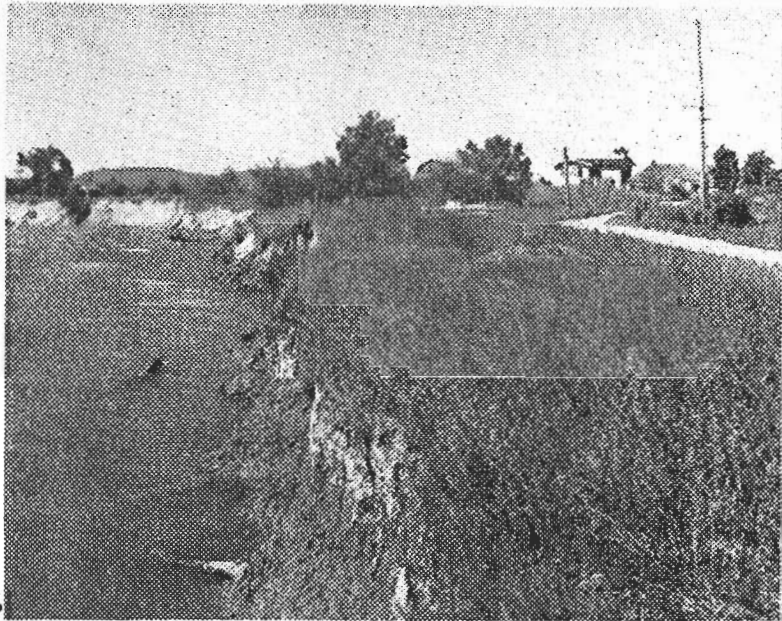
1. The Utopia cut which Mr. Williams concludes could be relieved by opening the channel on the south bank, a recommendation recognized by many including Mr. Walberg as the cheapest solution.

2. At the sharp bend below Utopia where the river has eaten into the Buchanan farm until it is now flowing down Wiseman

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Skagit River Erosion at Utopia



The upper picture is looking west along the Skagit River towards the Utopia school. The lower left shows the active cut at the Utopia bend on the Betschart brothers farm. The garage and cherry tree shown 30 feet back from the edge of the bank, a week later have completely disappeared. On the right Mr. Betschart is holding a potato vine pulled back from the bank of the river just in time. He digs a strip of potatoes about 10 feet wide from his patch every night in order to keep from losing them. Two-thirds of his spud patch patch has disappeared.