

Skagit River Control Vital Government Official States

D. A. Williams, Water Conservation Head, Notes
Damage During Inspection Trips; Says Main-
tenance Program Is Needed

A temporary maintenance program for the Skagit river, to prevent soil erosion, and a really comprehensive flood control problem, with the co-operation of the federal government, is badly needed, according to D. A. Williams, chief of the water conservation division of the U. S. soil conservation office in Portland. He was here last week with Paul Dickey, head of the local soil conservation office, on an inspection tour of the Skagit river.

He explained that the chief interest of his water conservation department was not entirely in the river but in the conservation of all water in the watershed, and the more complete use of the available water supply for irrigation and other needs. Until recently the soil conservation department was interested only in erosion control and the best uses of the soil, Williams said.

Now the department of agriculture has recognized that full attention to the use of the water of an area is as necessary as the best use of the soil, in the work of this division with individual farmers and farm groups.

Williams said that much of the revetment work done on the Skagit river was under the WPA appropriation, has been of much help in controlling soil erosion, but the failure of the county to maintain some of this work has prevented it from being as much help as it might have been. There are now a good many danger spots in the river, from Utopia down, in which bank erosion is very severe. The October and November high water aggravated this condition, he said, and he noticed more damage on his trip of inspection last week than he had seen on a previous visit to the Skagit with County Engineer Wahlberg a few months ago.

"The proper control of the Skagit river, both from bank erosion and from a flood danger point of view, is a big job and will involve the best of land-owners of the district and the co-operation of county, state and federal government. The army engineers have certain responsibilities and authority for work on the river to keep it open for navigation, and the department of agriculture is interested primarily in the watershed but not in the channel and the damage of the river currents to the land.

"Ultimately the program to control the situation must involve reforestation of badly denuded areas. This is more evident this year. A preventative maintenance program, with the removal of the worst trouble spots before they get serious, should be part of a far-sighted program and would save a lot of expense later on. There should be a maintenance crew working along the river at all times to accomplish this.

"The proposed Avon cutoff might be one feature of the long range plan, but this would not effect the stream bank above the site of the proposed cutoff. Engineers are now studying storage opportunities on the upper Skagit. I was disappointed that Skagit county had reduced its flood control assessment by half. The river channel in many places is in a critical condition. A definite program is badly needed. The county should make a survey to determine the worst danger spots. We want real facts of existing conditions.

"No accurate survey of the channel above Mt. Vernon is available. A permanent maintenance program is needed. By attending to a lot of little things now the big program which must be formed with federal, state and county co-operation will be greatly helped. The tendency is to ignore danger conditions until after a serious flood occurs. Now is the time to act."