

Purpose

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) is working on a Skagit River Basin flood reduction study. The purpose of these pages is to provide information on that study. This page will be updated with information as the need occurs, so plan to return often.

Skagit River Flood Reduction Study

Background

Located in northwestern Washington, the Skagit Basin reaches from Puget Sound to the crest of the Cascade Mountains. The Samish Basin lies slightly to the north, next to the western end of the larger Skagit Basin. These two basins make up 3,184 square miles of drainage area. The Skagit's principal tributaries are the Sauk, Suiattle, and Baker rivers. The basin's upper reaches are mountainous with deep valleys and turbulent streams. Below the town of Concrete, the valley widens into a broad 68,000-acre delta. The great difference in elevation throughout the basin, varying from mean sea level to 10,000 feet, and results in marked differences in temperature and precipitation. Record basin temperature extremes have reached a high of 109° F at Newhalem and a low of -10° F at Darrington Ranger Station and at the Mount Baker Lodge. About 75 percent of the precipitation falls between October and March. Heavy winter snow in the higher elevations remains until late spring or early summer.

Flood Facts

From Skagit County Web Site (www.skagitcounty.net)

- The Skagit River has flooded more than 60 times in the last century causing loss of human life and tens of millions of dollars of damage.
- Of the 108,000 people who live in Skagit County, more than 30,000 live in the 100-year flood plain and would need to be evacuated in a 100-year flood.
- The cities of Burlington and Mount Vernon are protected by a levee system that may not be adequate for large floods that have occurred and are predicted to occur in the future.
- In 2003, the Town of Hamilton and the communities of Cape Horn and Shangri La were severely flooded. 34 homes were destroyed and 115 received major damage. 141 homes received minor damage.
- In 2003, 3,425 persons were evacuated from Hamilton, Cape Horn, Shangri La, Burlington and Mount Vernon.
- Floods reported the size of 1917 and 1921 could breach the levees in Burlington and Mount Vernon. A 100-year flood in all probability would cause loss of human life and a predicted 1.3 billion dollars in damage.
- A 100-year flood could close down Interstate 5 and State Route 20, probably take out the Burlington-Northern Santa Fe railroad bridge, disrupt oil distribution from our refineries, cut off the water system for Fidalgo and Whidbey Island, NAS Whidbey and the Town of LaConner, flood our municipal waste water treatment plants in Burlington, Mount Vernon and Sedro-Woolley and severely damage the sewage collection system for 40 percent of Burlington and Mount Vernon.

Corps Points

- Our highest priority is the safety of the people in the local communities.
- The Corps works closely with Skagit County officials on finding the best flood control alternative for the people of the Skagit Valley.
- Flood damage reduction solutions must have minimal environmental impact or adequate mitigation for impacts.
- The feasibility study report will give us information to select the best possible alternative for the most cost-effective amount of money and least environmental impact.
- We must follow all of the steps in the process in order to complete a thorough study so we come up with the best solution for the taxpayers' money.

- A Corps flood damage reduction project must be engineeringly and environmentally sound.
- The Corps must balance competing needs. When determining flood damage reduction alternatives, the Corps must consider environmental impacts, impacts to other communities, current and future effects, and much more.
- Due to the size of potential floods and wide distribution of people in the Skagit valley, we will need to combine a number of flood protection projects to make a significant difference in flooding. The Corps will evaluate a wide range of different options and combinations to develop an array of projects that provide the most benefits at the least cost, with acceptable and safe construction.

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