

Skagit County, Corps sign cost sharing agreement for flood reduction, ecosystem restoration project

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SEATTLE -- The Skagit River Flood Damage Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration Project Feasibility Study moved a step closer to completion on Friday with the signing of an amended Federal Cost Sharing Agreement.

Officials with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Skagit County signed the document, which includes a project management plan for completing the study. Signing were Skagit County Commissioners Sharon Dillon, Ken Dahlsted and Don Munks and Col. Michael McCormick, commander the Corps' Seattle District. The estimated cost to complete the feasibility study phase is \$7.2 million. Skagit County will provide their 50 percent cost share for the study with work-in-kind.

The Skagit River has flooded more than 60 times in the past 100 years, causing tens of millions of dollars of damage. The purpose of the feasibility study is to formulate and recommend a comprehensive flood damage reduction plan for the Skagit River floodplain that will reduce flood hazards and damages in the project area.

"Our highest priority is the safety of people. We are working closely with Skagit County officials on finding the best flood damage reduction alternative," said McCormick.

According to Linda Smith, project manager, the feasibility study will also investigate complimentary measures to restore ecosystem functions and processes to benefit fish and wildlife in the project area.

The feasibility phase of project development involves technical studies to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, acceptability, and completeness of a range of alternative solutions to serious flooding problems, identify potential early action flood damage reduction measures, develop a mitigation plan, and identify ecosystem restoration opportunities in combination with the flood damage reduction measures.

"The federally recommended plan will provide critically needed flood damage reduction benefits at the most reasonable cost, will provide any required mitigation, and will have acceptable residual risk for people in unusually large flooding events," said Smith.

Due to the size of potential floods and wide distribution of people in the Skagit Valley, the Corps 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. The

regional nature of the feasibility study will help insure that we don't build a flood damage reduction project for one area that worsens flooding on neighboring lands," said Smith. "This winter the Corps will have an idea of what options are most cost effective and warrant more studies."

The Corps is completing the Skagit Flood Damage Reduction Study under the authority of Section 209 of the Flood Control Act of 1962 (PL 87-874). Skagit County is the local sponsor. The study is evaluating flood damage reduction measures for the Skagit River basin, including modifications to existing hydropower projects, levees, overflow channels, and nonstructural measures. Ecosystem restoration projects will be developed that are complimentary to the flood damage reduction projects.

In 1993, a favorable Reconnaissance Study of reducing flood damages in the Lower Skagit River Basin was completed by the Corps, with a recommendation to move ahead on a feasibility study. In 1994, Skagit County asked that further work be deferred. Following the November 1995 flood, Skagit County requested the study be resumed. The feasibility study is expected to cost about \$14.5 million and is scheduled for completion in 2010 based on full federal and non-federal funding support.

For more information on the study, visit the Corps' web site at www.nws.usace.army.mil or call Smith at (206) 764-6721.