

FINAL Meeting Minutes
Stillaguamish River Comprehensive Flood Study
Planning Advisory Committee Meeting
(September 26, 2000 from 2 to 4pm)

Attendees

Chuck Hazleton, Stillaguamish Flood Control District
Max Albert, Stillaguamish Flood Control District
Bobbie Eldridge, Stillaguamish Flood Control District
Dave Burdick, Department of Ecology
Si Butler, Snohomish County, Planning and Development Services
Mike Chamblin, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Glen Reed, U.S. Corps of Engineers
Terry Skorheim, USDA – Forest Service, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest
Bill Beckman, PW Director, City of Stanwood
Matt McCune, Mayor, City of Stanwood
Vaughn Collins, Snohomish County, Surface Water Management
Toni Turner, Snohomish County, Surface Water Management

Background

After introductions, Vaughn advised the committee that the County is currently involved in two flood studies. The first is a Section 205 Small Flood Study that is aimed at resolving Stanwood area flooding issues. The County is the official local sponsor. Both the Skagit River and Stillaguamish River (mainstem west of Interstate 5) are being analyzed to develop solutions to potential flooding of the Stanwood area from either river. The second study is the Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan or Stillaguamish Comprehensive Plan, and the study area incorporates the entire Stillaguamish watershed. The public involvement aspects of both plans are being combined to streamline the processes.

Stillaguamish Comprehensive Plan

This plan incorporates the entire watershed (north fork, south fork, and main stem river). There are two issues related to flooding that County staff proposed be addressed in the plan, but not subject to extensive analysis or recommended changes in current policy and regulations. These two issues are forest practices and storm water. State and private stakeholders met for over three years to develop the Forest and Fish Report, while a Presidential review of national forest practices resulted in the 1994 NW Forest Practice Plan. Both of these plans were developed with intense involvement from multiple agencies and affecting change to the results is outside of the scope of this study. It is County staff's opinion that changes in forest practices in the last decade due to Endangered Species Act (ESA) and other factors will have the effect of reducing flood impacts over time.

The Stillaguamish Comprehensive Study will include an assessment of the effects of current and future forest practices and harvest rates on flood behavior. This assessment will be limited to collecting and summarizing existing information, which will be sent out to the committee in the form of an issue paper for comments. The committee agreed, however, efforts will be made to

include language in the final flood study document that will allow for improvement in these existing plans in the future.

The second component, storm water, will be addressed by assessing, summarizing, and referencing appropriate documents (e.g., the Ecology Technical Storm Water Manual) as well. It is County staff's opinion that the volumes of water resulting from lowland stormwater to the river are insignificant compared to the volumes of water resulting from river flooding, and therefore it is better to keep the plan focused on big river flooding issues. Stormwater issues are also being addressed through the ESA and Clean Water Act National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) at all levels of government.

Problem Areas

Vaughn then advised the committee of several known problem areas along the north and south forks of the Stillaguamish River. These areas are listed below:

North Fork Stillaguamish (from upstream to downstream)

- Swede Haven Road
- Chatham Acres: Cabin taken out by an avulsion in a very small event. The river in that area is very dynamic.
- Oso/Deer Creek area: River bed is aggraded and levees along the river are overtopping in a bankfull (i.e., small) event. The levees were designed to protect to a 10-year flood event. In 1997, a small population center along Deer Creek was flooded.

South Fork Stillaguamish

- A major bank erosion area near Verlot
- In general, Mountain Loop Highway has several locations where erosion resulting from flood events may jeopardize the roadway.

Mainstem Stillaguamish River

- Dike Road Dike
- Gravel pit expansion – Smokey Point
- Stanwood area
- Silvana bank erosion concerns

In general, the hydrologic data indicate north fork flows are increasing. The committee was asked about any other known flood problems or issues. The committee advised that they have two concerns, which include poorly functioning channels and poor drainage. It was noted that if the existing forestry practices as summarized in the upcoming issue paper cannot be resolved, then these two areas must be addressed. The committee noted no other specific flood problems.

Regulatory Issues

A component of the plan will be to evaluate of the County's flood hazard code. Specifically identifying flood elevations in areas such as Stanwood and Arlington. In addition, identifying

areas of the Snohomish County regulations that may not address flood risk effectively, such as the construction within the Channel Migration Zone (CMZ) will be included.

The committee recommended that work by FEMA and King County (KC mapped the meander zones to develop regulations that prohibited construction with that zone) be reviewed and floodway mapping (with the aid of pictures during a flood event) be included. In addition, the committee recommended dovetailing this study with the ESA requirements as they relate to CMZ regulations.

The committee also asked as part of the regulatory review, that development along the bluffs of the river system be reviewed and a strategy developed for allowing construction on the bluff. In addition, this study should be linked to the ESA, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources' Habitat Conservation Plan, and any private forestry plans either by referring to those plans or by addressing specific components of those plans as appropriate.

In addition to these issues, portions of the mainstem (Old Stillaguamish and Upper Stillaguamish River) are aggrading. A greater volume of the river's flow is being carried by Cook Slough and further downstream by Hat Slough. This study will include an assessment of long-term implications of these channel changes.

The committee also suggested the County add in snow pack gages as part of the flood warning system. Whatcom County uses these to forecast flows on the Nooksack River. Vaughn advised the County can look into this right away, and generally any flood warning actions can be implemented immediately. He also said that the County had entered into an agreement with the USGS to operate the flow gage on the south fork of the Stillaguamish near Granite Falls since fall 1999. In addition, the County will be installing a new telemetered gage at Arlington this fall to replace the old manual gage. This will provide the first automated data from the official Weather Service flood forecast point for the Stillaguamish River. In addition, both the City of Stanwood and Flood Control District representatives have expressed interest in a gage near the Park and Ride area.

Public Involvement

Toni then described the current public involvement efforts being undertaken by the County. A fact sheet/questionnaire was mailed to residents in the Stillaguamish Watershed in an effort to ascertain additional areas of flood damage and to determine solutions residents wanted pursued as part of the study. A summary of the results will be distributed to the committee when available.

In addition to the questionnaire, the County will also be hosting a series of open houses. The first set of these events will take place on October 24 and 25 in Stanwood and Arlington, respectively. These open houses are intended to provide residents an opportunity to speak one-on-one with County staff, private, state, and federal forestry representatives, and City of Stanwood and Stillaguamish Flood Control District representatives. In addition, staff from the Department of Emergency Management will be present.

As part of the Section 205 Small Flood Study, a Home Elevation Study is also being conducted. A mailing will be sent to residents within the study area by the end of the month. This questionnaire is an effort to assess interest in a home elevation program if offered by the Corps. Under this Corps program, a resident would be required to pay 35% of the total cost for elevating the home and the Corps would be responsible for the balance.

The committee agreed that quarterly meetings combined with regular mailings would be adequate to stay apprised of on-going activities. Additional meetings will be arranged as necessary. An updated work plan and results of the Home Elevation Study will be forwarded as soon as they become available.

Section 205 Flood Study Alternatives

Glen Reed, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, then reviewed the various alternatives being studied to reduce the potential of flooding to Stanwood and surrounding areas. The draft plans are summarized in the attached Corps document.

In response to widening Irvine Slough and constructing a bypass north (or south) of the existing pump plant, City staff raised concerns about increasing the risk of flood damage to the City of Stanwood proper. In 1995, sandbagging at Larson Dam and along SR532 was required to protect the City from the flood threat. This flood was determined to be 10-year event. In addition, City staff advised that if the sand plug is removed from the bypass, no protection exists from the potential of a high tide occurring before the plug can be reconstructed. This potential places both the City and the crop lands upstream of Irvine Slough in danger.

Glen advised that none of these plans have been finalized and that no alternative will be pursued that causes increased flood damages in one area at the expense of protecting another. In addition, the only way any project will be funded is if the Corps can show a significant benefit to the City of Stanwood, which means that any alternative chosen will protect the City to the 100-year flood event. If it cannot be shown that any one alternative or combination of alternatives meets these minimum criteria, it is very unlikely that any alternative will be pursued.

The committee advised that getting the flow back into the river from the floodplain is important. In addition, dredging the river was discussed, however, without being able to control the source of sediment input (therefore requiring ongoing O&M by the Flood Control District) and with the environmental regulations restricting such activity, this option is not very likely. Another suggestion was to identify and investigate all possible flood storage areas in the upper watershed, which will be pursued.

The meeting concluded at 4:15 p.m.. An additional meeting was scheduled with staff from the City of Stanwood, the Corps, and County to further discuss the modeling results.