

ForestTalk



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THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

DEPARTMENT OF LANDS, FORESTS
AND WATER RESOURCES

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POLICY STATEMENT

The objective of the British Columbia Forest Service, as the forest administrative agency for the government of British Columbia, is to develop and enforce policies which will ensure for all time the proper balance of timber supply, forage production, forest recreation, wildlife protection and environmental preservation on the Crown forest lands of the province.

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COVER PHOTO

Hundreds of lakes and streams located deep in our forests provide seclusion and recreation for growing numbers of people.

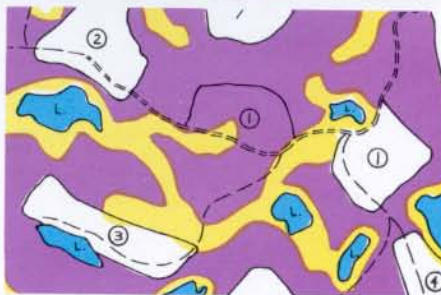


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Looking north over top end of Ross Lake at low water. Canada-U.S. boundary crosses near centre of photo.

Proposed raising of Ross Dam would extend reservoir eight miles into Canada - to about foreground of photo.



An Armchair Visit to . . .

The Skagit Valley

By Ray Wormald

It's just another country road. It branches southward off the Trans-Canada Highway about two miles west of Hope in the majestic Fraser River valley. At the intersection an insignificant sign tells anyone who notices that it's the Silver-Skagit Road.

Every day of the year hundreds of people whiz by the narrow roadway - bound either to or from Vancouver, some 95 miles away. Very few realize that this inconspicuous country road winds its way nearly 50 miles to the Canada-U.S. border, and through some of the most beautiful and varied scenery found anywhere.

It leads into a vast region which over the past few years has become a focal point for a mixture of concern, intense study, controversy and international negotiations. It's the much-publicized Skagit Valley.

What brought this great stretch of river-valley land into the publicity spotlight? It's a long story and a complicated one. And getting more complicated as time goes on.

Before considering some of the pros and cons of the issues at stake, let's take an armchair journey into the heart of this wondrous valley through which the Skagit flows.

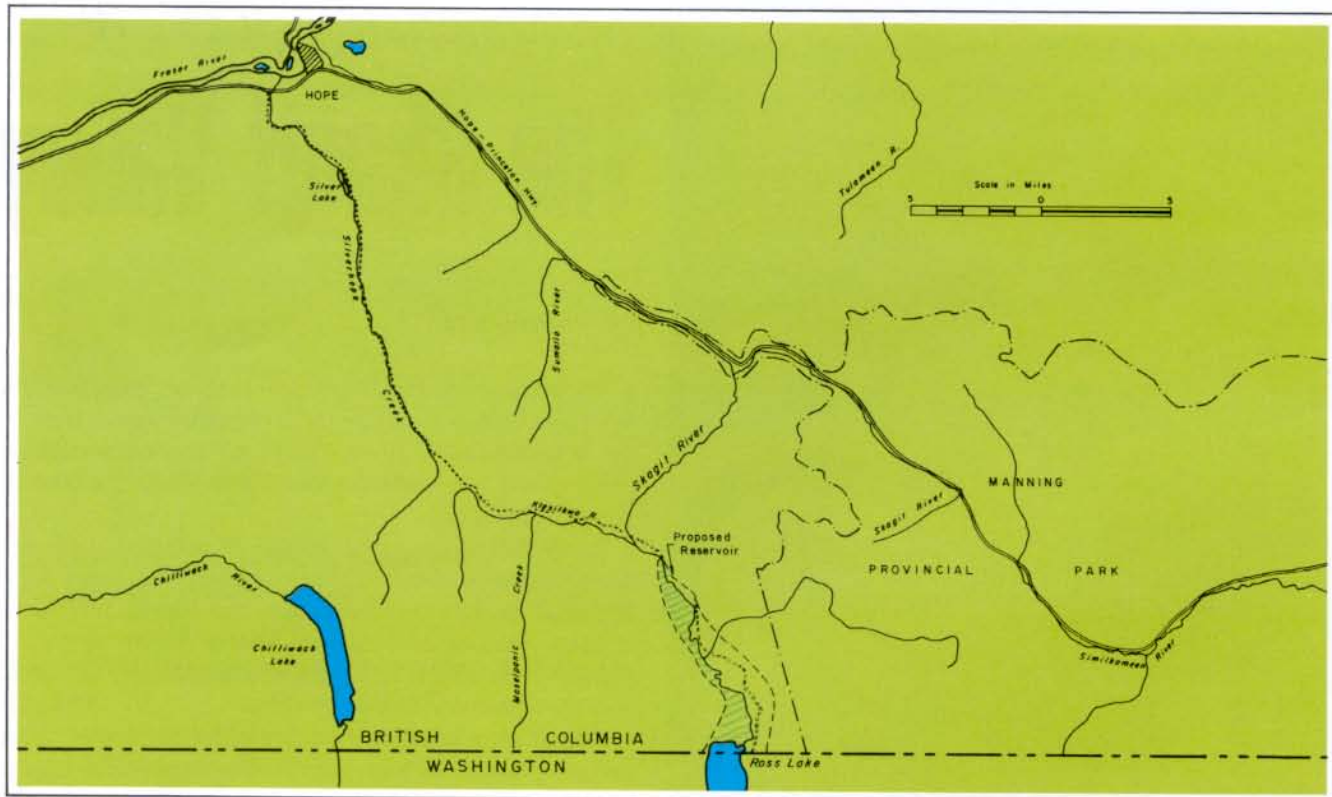
Bearing the name of a proud and vigorous American Indian band, the Skagit River originates in British Columbia's Manning Park. It carves its way southward through some 30 Canadian miles and just across the international boundary it flows into Ross Lake in Washington State.

Abundant Wildlife

Mountains ranging up to 8,000 feet look over many portions of the valley; and the entire region is home to a great variety of wildlife.

There are two distinct populations of deer. A black-tailed variety is found low in the valley, and Mule deer inhabit the higher eastern slopes. The valley's lakes and streams host several varieties of ducks, and on various occasions geese have been seen in the area. It's great grouse country; and the sprawling valley is a stop-over point for many species of water fowl on migration routes. A recent survey determined that no less than 44 species of birds wintered in the valley.

And that's just the beginning of the wildlife inventory. There are also beavers, bear, cougar, bobcats, raccoons, otter, mink, weasels, marten and skunk.



The Skagit rises in Manning Park and drains into Puget Sound.

Surprisingly, the variety and numbers of fish in the rivers and streams are apparently limited, although lower portions of the Skagit River (south of the border) contain numerous salmon spawning grounds. A crew using Scuba diving gear in the Canadian section of the waterway reported seeing only seven adult fish per mile of river. Catches of Rainbow trout and a few Dolly Varden char have been reported.

Plant Life Bountiful

Because of its mixed bag topography, with low-lying valley bottoms, alpine plateaus, and mountainous slopes, plant life of the entire region is widely varied and bountiful. And undoubtedly the "queen" of them all is the beautiful Pacific rhododendron. The plants grow either singly or in great clusters, and are found in numerous regions throughout the valley system. Some of the rhododendron patches are so thick it's almost impossible to penetrate them; and some are so large they look like trees. Normally in June they reach the peak of their bloom beauty, and many are the camera-packing visitors who venture off the Hope-Princeton Highway (at Manning Park) to enjoy the colorful show. The wild rhododendrons are protected by law in British Columbia, and it is illegal to dig up the plants or pick the flowers. Incidentally, did you know the rhododendron is a member of the heather family?

Because the region is less than 100 miles from the Pacific Ocean, rain is abundant - 30 to 40 inches annually. A winter

snowfall of more than five feet is not uncommon. Summertime temperatures range up to the 100-degree mark.

Logging in 1858

Records show that logging in the area was underway as far back as 1858 - initially providing rough timbers for mining operations triggered by the famous Fraser River gold rush. A limited number of loggers are still in the region, with Douglas fir, hemlock, cedar, cypress and spruce being the main commercial species.

A few enterprising men are finding it worth their while to return to areas logged many years ago. Those were wasteful days in the forest and huge, high stumps were common in the wake of logging operations. Many of them are cedar, still with much solid wood, and with today's demand for shingles and shakes they are literally treasures.

Several large portions of the valley region have been included in the province's reforestation program. Between 1970 and 1973 the B.C. Forest Service planted some 890,000 seedlings (mostly Douglas fir) on a total of 1,650 acres. The planting program proposed for this year involves about 230,000 trees on 460 acres.

Prime Recreation

These facts, together with a host of others, lead to one very firm conclusion: Because it is within fairly easy driving



A variety of wildlife, beautiful scenery and colorful vegetation make the valley appealing to visitors.

distance from big and rapidly expanding Vancouver, the entire Skagit River valley region is being regarded as a precious piece of real estate for recreational purposes.

And this is where we can refer to earlier mention of the valley now being the subject of much controversy and concern.

In a nutshell here's the situation: A hydro-electric complex below Ross Lake provides Seattle with much of its electrical power . . . and Ross Lake serves as the system's reservoir. Like most other places, the big Washington State city is growing. It needs more electricity.

To provide this, plans were made to raise the Ross Dam, which, in turn, would result in the flooding of some 6,000 acres in the Canadian portion of the Skagit River valley. Under the program, with the Ross Lake reservoir at full flood, the northern tip of the lake would extend about eight miles into Canada.

Initial agreements for the raising of the dam were made between Seattle Light and British Columbia's previous government. The province was to receive about \$34,500 annually from Seattle in return for the right to flood the Canadian portion of the Skagit Valley.

Voices of Protest

Proposals to raise the dam and flood a portion of the Canadian Skagit Valley were made years ago, but it was only in recent years that voices were raised in protest. Various

environmental groups claim the flooding will destroy much of the existing scenic beauties and features of the region, and have adverse effects on some of the area's wildlife.

The present government of British Columbia is strongly opposed to the flooding proposal. Resources Minister Robert Williams has observed that "... irreparable damage to the province will occur if the natural water level of the Skagit River at and above the international boundary is allowed to rise above its present level." The government is also studying the legality of some clauses of the flooding agreement. And in addition, there is deep concern about the actual related financial agreements made by the previous provincial administration.

However, there is another school of thought that favors the northward extension of Ross Lake some eight miles into Canadian territory. Its proponents claim the resultant waterway would be a great recreational asset, providing extensive facilities for boating, fishing, swimming, lakeside parks, trails, and a host of other outdoor values.

Because of its international implications, the flood-or-not-to-flood issue has involved federal agencies of both the United States and Canada, and, of course, Washington state and British Columbia. A number of hearings have been held to discuss pros and cons of the issue. The most recent sessions were held in April of this year; and there will undoubtedly be others.

So like the flow of the river itself, the saga of the Skagit continues.



