

Finley Still Fights Flood Control Project In Valley

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(By William L. Finley, Sc. D.)

Since the plan of the Willamette valley project was studied out and formulated solely by engineers, we have always taken the stand that this is the mechanical phase of the project and that other important angles should also have been studied by scientists and economists, and a public report filed. Since this was avoided by those promoters who were anxious to profit by federal funds, we wish to have the following matters considered:

In the first place, the gains of a project of this kind have been analyzed from an engineering standpoint. In the second place, the losses from the human and scientific standpoints have not been considered or reported. Therefore, I should like to point out the effect of the proposed dams in flooding valleys with growing towns and flourishing farms, the destruction of our natural resources, especially our salmon runs, and the mutilation of scenic and recreational values.

If the plan for the seven dams on the upper Willamette and its tributaries is carried out to protect residents from floods in one part of the valley, a report should have been made of the resulting damage to many people in the upper valleys by flooding their property and homes. If the proposed high dams are built on the north and south forks of the Santiam, the McKenzie and the upper Willamette, as an example of destruction let us consider Sweet Home.

It was nearly a century ago that Lowell Ames Sr. settled in the beautiful valley of the south Santiam. He is said to have sung, "Home, Sweet Home." Since that day the pioneers

have prospered, but how many have seen the hundreds of homes and farms of contented people or motored the picturesque highway along fine fishing streams and across the Cascade divide to eastern Oregon? Profitable business firms, public schools, churches, theaters, hospitals, lumber mills, power and telephone lines, water systems, highways and railroads have developed property worth in excess of \$2,000,000. Another town to be drowned out is Foster, a few miles above Sweet Home.

The promoters of the Willamette valley project claim that even if the dams drown out four valleys and seven towns, it will be for the greatest good of the greatest number. This statement has been challenged by thousands of people and should be publicly considered. If the government is forced to pay for more land and buildings destroyed, this does not in any way compensate for the stream of refugees leaving Sweet Home valley with their chattels to start life again here, there or anywhere.

"Why should a prosperous minority be sacrificed for the majority?" asked a leading resident of Sweet Home. "Is this country going to stand for high-handed methods like Germany conquering Poland? Does the Willamette river basin commission sanction the Russia-Finland contest as an example of the greatest number?"

The public should note the following statement published in the Statesman of Salem, Oregon, June 17, 1939: "Ninety-five per cent of the Sweet Home residents are favorable to the removal of the town,"

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declared R. H. Kipp, executive secretary of the Willamette river basin commission."

The proof is available to show that this is a false statement. After it was published, a petition was signed by 48 Sweet Home businessmen and women and 186 property owners, protesting the building of this dam and the flooding of their farms and homes.

The primary reason advanced in justification of the project on the upper Willamette was to protect farmers and other land owners along the river from being damaged by flood waters. The engineers' study indicated that the largest reported floods of the upper Willamette occurred during December, 1861, Jan-

uary, 1881, and February, 1890, all during the winter months. Floods on the main stream usually occur between November and March, the main flood water below Oregon City being back water from annual freshets on the Columbia and therefore having nothing to do with the upper Willamette.

Since floods in the Willamette valley come almost exclusively during the winter months, how can there be damage to farm crops? To be sure, there is always a possibility of some damage from cutting away the river banks and changing of the channel, but during the ordinary winter high water, while some farmers may report damage from washing out of banks or loss of soil, others have reported exactly the opposite. If damage to some farmers is reported, benefits to others should also be recorded. In the Enterprise of Independence, Oregon, under date

of December 22, 1939, we find an editorial entitled "River Overflow Beneficial." It states as follows:

"To many, this (the Willamette river dams project) seems to be a very fine thing, but to the hop men of this district, it will be a different story. The overflowing of the Willamette river not only kills off the gophers and moles in the hop yards, but it places a silt on the soil which is worth several thousands of dollars for fertilizer. It has been pointed out that if the money spent for the (proposed) dams, or even a portion of it, would be spent on river revetment work, reinforcing the banks and dredging of the channel, the overflowing of the ground would be worth many times as much as the damage done.

"The present project, if carried through to completion will be very expensive to the taxpayers and will also cost the hop growers thousands

of dollars in fertilizer and force most of them to irrigation."

Such facts as these should be made known to the public. Indeed there is no doubt that the whole truth and the real truth at the bottom of this Willamette valley flood control project has not been unearthed. From time immemorial we know that river bottoms regularly covered with silt make the richest land for agriculture and that on flats covered with rich, sandy loam without effort or expense on his part, the farmer produces his largest and finest crops.