

The Sacramento Bee

Janis Heaphy • Publisher and President

Rick Rodriguez
Executive Editor/Senior Vice President

David Holwerk
Editorial Page Editor

Joyce Terhaar
Managing Editor

Maria Henson
Deputy Editorial Page Editor

EDITORIALS

Finally, no flood fight House OK Folsom Dam fix; will voters?

Published Thursday, March 22, 2007
Story appeared in EDITORIALS section, Page B6

What a wonderfully quiet moment it was in the U.S. House of Representatives the other day when the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved a \$683 million flood-control project for Folsom Dam.

Off and on over the past decade, this committee has been the scene of some strange, ugly fights, centering on Sacramento's flood control problems and Rep. John Doolittle's desire to build an Auburn dam rather than pursue the downstream solutions on the table.

When Doolittle's Republican Party controlled the House, progress on flood control for the region got bogged down in the Auburn dam debate. Entire packages of national flood control legislation were at times delayed. There was one infamous subcommittee meeting when such members as the Bay Area's Rep. Ellen Tauscher entered the room not knowing what she was about to vote on because the Republican leadership had kept the legislation and its Sacramento-area contents a secret.

The theatrics were a sad departure from the tradition of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's crafting flood control legislation in an open, bipartisan fashion. Deviating from that tradition served neither political party in the long run.

The new challenge -- and it is a whopper -- is a lack of fiscal discipline. The Sacramento project was part of a \$40 billion water and flood control bill. Necessary spending reforms to justify projects were conspicuously missing. So long as pork takes a front seat to important policy reforms, Sacramento's project in the mix remains at risk.

The local Folsom Dam project would create a new spillway to allow the dam to release more water earlier during storms. That's absolutely essential to protect Sacramento. The existing outlets are configured in a way that prevents maximum releases until it is possibly too late. When a mammoth cycle of storms aims for our area, the need is to react as quickly as possible. And for Folsom Dam, a timely response will require a new spillway.

In the House, special thanks go to Sacramento Rep. Doris Matsui and James Oberstar of Minnesota, the committee chairman. Getting Congress to approve funding for the project, however, is only one part of the puzzle. A vital piece involves Sacramentans being willing to invest in flood control projects. Congress typically provides 65 percent of the money and the state 25 percent, leaving local residents with 10 percent of the tab. That money must come from a proposed property assessment. In an election being conducted by mail, the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency has sent ballots to property owners in the floodplain.

The election lasts until April 19. If your ballot envelope is stuck in that mail pile at home, please take the time to vote Yes. This is a historic moment that could dramatically improve the region's ability to withstand its greatest natural threat.

FOUNDED 1857 

The Sacramento Bee

FOLSOM DAM FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT: Politicians hail launch of Folsom Dam project; For \$1.3 billion, it'll double area's flood protection by 2015

Sacramento Bee – 1/12/08 by Cathy Locke, staff writer

With a series of bangs, streaks of light and smoke rose above the Folsom Dam overlook about 1 p.m. Friday in a pyrotechnic display marking the official groundbreaking for a \$1.3 billion project that will double the current level of flood protection for the Sacramento area.



Interior Secretary, Dirk Kempthorne

"Short of building an ark, this is the best protection we can offer the citizens of Sacramento," Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne told a crowd of federal, state and local officials gathered in the parking area off Folsom Dam Road.

Kempthorne was joined on the dais by Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger; U.S. Reps. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, Dan Lungren, R-Gold River, and Doris Matsui, D-Sacramento; state Sens. Dave Cox, R-Fair Oaks, and Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento; and Sacramento Mayor Heather Fargo.

All hailed the project, which will include construction of an auxiliary spillway, as a model of bipartisanship and cooperation among governmental agencies. The undertaking is a joint effort of the federal Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Central Valley Flood Protection Board and the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency.

The project, to be completed in 2015, is designed to protect the Sacramento area from a 200-year flood. The auxiliary spillway will include a 1,000-foot-long approach channel; a concrete control structure, including six submerged gates; a 3,000-foot-long spillway chute; and a stilling basin. Also included is work to shore up dikes around the lake.

Mike Finnegan, acting regional director of the Bureau of Reclamation's Mid-Pacific Region, said the overlook site will be excavated for the new spillway.

"We've fought a lot over the structures that are needed for the American River," Doolittle said.

But, recalling his work with late Sacramento-area Rep. Bob Matsui and former Rep. Doug Ose, he said, "We found common ground and moved forward."



Representative John Doolittle

Several speakers noted that Sacramento's flood risks are greater than those of New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina.

Schwarzenegger thanked the government officials and agencies that cooperated on the Folsom Dam project as well as voters who approved bond measures for levee improvements.



Representative Doris Matsui

Matsui said recent storms are a reminder that "we are at the mercy of Mother Nature and the levees and dams that protect us."

Matsui said federal, state and local governments must continue to make the flood-control improvements a top priority.

"We have to continue to fund this project every single year until is finished," she said.