



Editorial: Flood agency makes progress on Natomas flood protection

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In working to stay ahead of the next raging winter, the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency can't afford to hit logjams. That's why it is encouraging that SAFCA has scored several recent breakthroughs on plans to upgrade Natomas' levee, modify Folsom Dam and establish a financing plan to bring the entire Sacramento floodplain to a 200-year level of protection.

Lawsuit settled

SAFCA is planning a two-year, \$576 million project to widen and fortify Natomas levees prone to seepage. Hundreds of thousands of truckloads of dirt will be needed. Residents of the Garden Highway filed an environmental lawsuit, which could have delayed the agency's ability to sell bonds and proceed with the project. But last month, both sides drafted a settlement, which the agency's board approved Thursday. As part of that deal, SAFCA will not use the Garden Highway for construction traffic and will take other steps to limit the impact on residents. The agency has also agreed to seek a study of a new bicycle trail, meaning that a wider levee could bring safer cycling.

Kerridge sees the light

For far too many months, SAFCA's staff has been dealing with a misguided lobbying campaign by Natomas developers who want the governor to declare an emergency in the basin. Lawyer Greg Thatch and homebuilders alarmed by a pending building moratorium in Natomas claim that SAFCA's two-year schedule is too slow in bringing levees back up to federal standards. They claim an emergency declaration would cut through red tape and speed up the levee work. The city of Sacramento hired an outside firm, MWH Americas, to examine SAFCA's plan of action. The contractor's conclusion? The agency's schedule "was very aggressive" and wouldn't be sped up by an emergency declaration. To his credit, City Manager Ray Kerridge is no longer part of the Thatch contingent that is blowing smoke on this issue. Perhaps the air will clear now and SAFCA can get on with its

work.

Development fees

SAFCA is pushing ahead with plans for a development fee to be assessed on all new structures in the 200-year floodplain. It will raise \$132 million *over* 11 years. Without those funds, the agency would *have* to wait for federal funding and be unable to double the area's flood protection in a decade. The fee - which would add about \$4,500 to the cost of a typical house - would ensure that, as development occurs in the floodplain, it is offset with projects that will reduce the overall risk of flooding. Through extensive talks, SAFCA's staff has fine-tuned the proposal to limit impacts on redevelopment projects. SAFCA's board gave initial approval to the fee plan Thursday, and should give it a final endorsement on May 15.