



## Editorial: Natomas delay? No, it's too risky

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Over the next four years, no public safety project in Sacramento will be more crucial than shoring up Natomas' levees. If this project were to be further delayed, it would leave thousands of residents and businesses vulnerable to winter floods like the ones that are threatening North Dakota.

It would also leave them with several extra years of a building moratorium and flood insurance requirements until the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency substantially completes its work. Fortunately, there are several encouraging signs that SAFCA will be able to push ahead with this \$618million project, even with the logistical hurdles it confronts.

On the plus side, the state of California last week was able to sell \$6.5 billion in infrastructure bonds in a mere two days. Treasurer Bill Lockyer was hoping to sell \$4 billion in three days, but demand exceeded expectations. Because of that sale, the Natomas project is slated to receive an undetermined amount of bond proceeds, the Department of Finance confirmed Monday. It also increases the likelihood that the state will be able to sell future bonds and meet previous commitments to SAFCA. Secure long-term funding would go a long way toward undercutting the arguments of a small number of Garden Highway residents who have filed some misguided lawsuits against the project.

A few weeks ago, the Garden Highway Community Association filed two new legal challenges, in state and federal court, against SAFCA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The group alleges that both agencies failed to analyze the full environmental consequences of plans to widen and strengthen sections of the Sacramento River levee.

This is the second time Garden Highway residents have sued over the Natomas project. This time, they are claiming that SAFCA is unnecessarily preparing to cut down hundreds of trees, without the necessary funding to widen the levee onto land where the trees now stand.

Will trees suffer to make levees stronger? Undoubtedly. To make the levee wider and less prone to seepage, SAFCA plans to remove or relocate 900 trees in its first phase of construction, and 2,000 more as the levee work progresses. All together, about 15 acres would be affected. Yet for every acre of tree canopy removed, SAFCA has agreed to create three new acres. The agency has a strong record of following through on its commitments.

Environmentalists we've consulted say this mitigation goes far beyond the standard of other developers in Natomas – such as Sacramento International Airport. In addition, SAFCA is planning a new drainage canal in Natomas that

could help in the recovery of giant garter snakes, an imperiled species in the basin.

SAFCA is getting it from all sides at the moment. Residents in low-lying Natomas want it to move faster. A handful of residents perched on higher ground on the Garden Highway – homeowners who are not subject to the flood insurance requirements facing other Natomas residents – want the agency to slow down and do no levee work that affects their homes, their commute routes or any trees. Amid all this background noise, SAFCA has to remain focused on a single goal – public safety. It appears to be doing so, and for good reason.