



August 10, 2009

Truckee River flood plan meeting Monday night

By Jeff DeLong
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With recent legislation, significant projects planned in the near future and thousands of new jobs possible, backers of the Truckee River flood project want to share the news.

That's the central idea behind tonight's planned town hall meeting to brief the public on a long-pursued strategy to control the flooding that regularly occurs along the river.

"We've got a lot of traction going with the project now. The stars are being aligned," said Washoe County Commissioner Bob Larkin, chairman of a coalition of local governments pursuing the flood project. "We want to bring the public up to speed," Larkin said.

Important progress was made during Nevada's 2009 legislative session, with two pieces of law critical to the flood project passed by lawmakers and signed by Gov. Jim Gibbons:

- A measure that will allow Washoe County to create a new flood control authority with the power to raise fees charged to residents and businesses benefitting from the flood project. That ability is needed to raise about \$300 million of the \$400 million in local costs for the \$1.5 billion project.
- Another measure makes public funds available to assist with the cost of elevating 120 homes in Hidden Valley and the nearby Eastside subdivision and to flood-proof some structures in downtown Reno.

Moving forward with the local fee program -- which could be in place as soon as next spring -- is needed to keep momentum while the project awaits major federal funding, said Naomi Duerr, flood project director. Much of the money for the project will come from through the Army Corps of Engineers, which is currently reviewing the project.

"Unless we get (the fee program) going, we'll have to stop and wait for the corps," Duerr said. "There could be a one or two-year gap, and we'd like to move forward."

Some of the project is already done, including construction of a levee and floodwall at the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony and restoration of the river channel at Lockwood and points downstream. Money is available to complete another project, the \$1.5 million construction of an elevated walkway to act as a flood barrier at Rainbow Bend in Storey County, with construction expected to commence soon.

Duerr said she wants to avoid any lull in progress. Local fees could help the home elevation project proceed in the near future, as well as speed up the planned relocation of the North Truckee Drain to reduce its contribution to river flooding.

Other near-term projects could include construction of a \$3 million levee at Wadsworth and flood improvements to several of the smaller bridges spanning the river. An early start to the planned

terracing of parts of the river where it flows through the Truckee Meadows could also occur within a year and a half, Duerr said. Riverbank terracing, which allows floodwaters to slow and spread out naturally over undeveloped floodplain, is a centerpiece concept in the "living river" flood control strategy.

The work is costly but also comes with benefits and those aren't only flood protection, Duerr said. The flood project could produce between 14,000 and 19,000 new jobs over 15 years and Duerr said she considers that estimate conservative.

Also tonight, a new Web site will also be unveiled to help guide contractors interested in bidding for some of the coming work associated with the flood project.

Additional Facts

Flood plan

What: Town hall meeting

Where: Washoe County Commission chambers, 1001 E. Ninth St., Reno

When: Tonight, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

ON RGJ.COM: Log on to read past stories about the Truckee River flood project.
