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Flood protection authority moves forward with JPA

by Sarah Cooper

02.02.10 - 07:48 pm



RENO — Despite delays in federal funding, the Truckee River Flood Control project is pressing forward in developing a joint powers authority that would give the project power to levee fees on locals.

“The corps (Army Corps of Engineers) delay is disappointing,” said flood project director Naomi Duerr, “but

what is happening with the corps doesn’t change the traction we have gained on this project.”

Due to some errors in hydraulic modeling, the Army Corps of Engineers will not present the project for Congressional approval until 2012 — two years later than expected — meaning the flood project will be lacking a significant portion of its funding until at least that date.

However, at a joint meeting of the Reno and Sparks city councils and the Washoe County Board of Commissioners on Monday, the government heads unanimously approved a list of key agreements in forming the JPA. These bullet points will now be drafted into an official agreement that could create a new entity: the Truckee River Flood Protection Authority.

That final agreement must still be approved by local governments before the authority is officially born, which is expected to happen in May. Duerr is aiming for a July start date for the JPA.

If formed, the authority would have powers similar to the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, including the ability to charge residents for flood protection services.

“As good as (the current project funding is) we will need more,” Duerr said. “That means possibly implementing a fee.”

In order to complete its slew of river restoration, levee and flood protection projects, the flood planners need about \$1.6 billion, according to flood project staff. Between \$400 and \$500 million of this will come from the pockets of locals and grant givers, according to Duerr. The flood protection project as a whole has more than 40 individual projects scattered across northern Nevada, including building flood deterrent structures, diverting the flooding tendencies of the Truckee River and restoring the river’s environment.

Currently, the flood project is bringing in funds for these improvements through a combination of local taxes and grants.

“We have been getting creative,” Duerr said of the project’s revenue structure.

But the project is still more than \$100 million short, meaning locals could have to pay a fee.

Duerr said that fee, how much it would charge and who would pay the bill would be up to the JPA after it is formed.

“My best guess today is that (fee) is one year away,” she said.

Preliminary estimates from flood project staff state that the fee could be near the \$5.41 that Sparks residents pay now for the flood project as an addition to their utility bills.

Currently, area residents are also paying a 1/8 cent sales tax to fund the project. In addition, project planners have applied for many grants and received help from businesses and organizations.

A recently completed flood wall near the Grand Sierra Resort was paid for in part by Walmart, which is building a store in the area now protected by the wall.

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