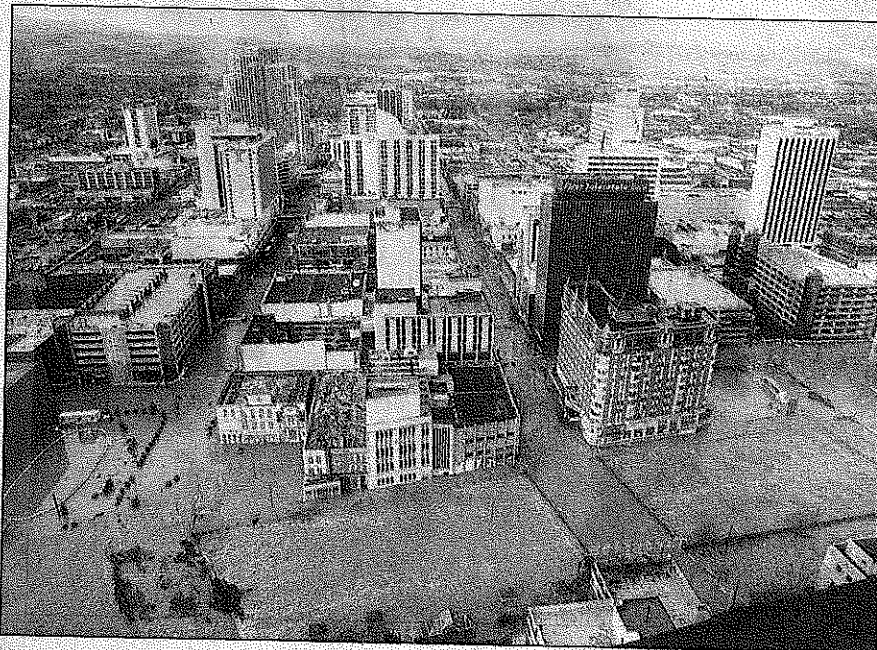


FLOOD CONTROL

Delays in flood plan could soak region



MARILYN NEWTON/RGJ FILE

Above, downtown Reno sits under floodwaters on Jan. 2, 1997, after heavy rains and flooding pounded the region. Below left, a youngster crosses First Street in downtown Reno on Jan. 2, 1997. Below right, Mary and Bill Gross make their way to their Hidden Valley home on Jan. 4, 1997. Local officials fear that flood-control delays put the region at risk of similar flooding.

Big floods

■ A 100-year flood is a flood so severe it has only a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. Local officials hope to protect Reno-Sparks from a 117-year flood event, such as in January 1997. A flood of similar severity occurred in the area in 1955. The most recent flood, which was significantly smaller, was Dec. 31, 2005.

■ Flood of 1997: A series of warm storms dropped heavy rain on a low-elevation snowpack, causing the Truckee River to surge over its banks. The flow in downtown Reno reached 23,000 cubic feet per second on Jan. 1 compared to normal flows that time of year of between 200 and 300 cfs. Downtown Reno and the Sparks industrial area were flooded, with much of the Truckee Meadows inundated by muddy water. Damage and economic losses in Reno-Sparks were estimated at \$680 million. The same flood today would cost more than \$1 billion.

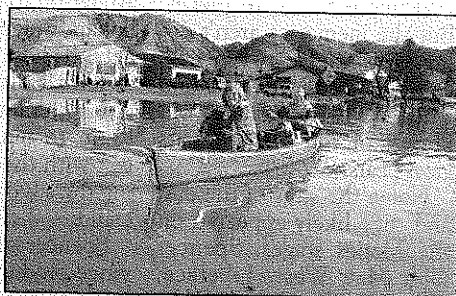
■ "Living river" flood plan: The locally preferred plan would rely less on unsightly floodwalls and levees than other proposals. It would allow floodwaters to slow and spread out naturally over undeveloped floodplains and terraced portions of the riverbank. It could cost up to \$1.6 billion.

What's next

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will hire consultants to fix modeling problems in its flood plan. That could allow congressional authorization and initial funding appropriations for the flood project in 2012.



DAVID B. PARKER/RGJ FILE



MARILYN NEWTON/RGJ FILE

Officials concerned after Army errors slow congressional OK

BY JEFF DELONG
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Errors made while rushing through a flood plan for the Truckee River will delay congressional approval by another year, possibly endangering Reno and Sparks with more floods before the project is ever built, officials said.

News that federal authorization of the Truckee River Flood Project now won't occur until 2012 is the latest in a series of delays for the long-discussed flood-control effort, designed to prevent disasters like the flood of January 1997.

As a result, officials said, the Truckee Meadows and its residents remain in danger.

"This keeps moving back," said Ron Smith, a Sparks councilman who serves on a local coalition pursuing the flood project. "We've got a lot of risk out there, and this is unacceptable."

The latest problem stems from a series of

errors made in hydraulic models for a government flood plan legally required as an alternative to the \$1.6 billion "living river" flood plan supported by local government, said Roger Henderson, project manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Corps intends to hire consultants to fix the problem by next September, a process that should delay congressional authorization until at least 2012.

Trying to rush the process was part of the latest problem, Henderson said.

"We took a lot of short cuts, and there were risks, and for some reason, the risks didn't work out for us," Henderson said.

"If I'm going to give you a delay, I want this to be the last delay," he said.

Any delay is a potentially serious problem, said Washoe County Commissioner Bob Larkin, who chairs the flood panel.

"Every minute now that we procrastinate, we delay, brings us closer to the next event,"

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From 1A

Larkin said. "And the next event won't be a little event. It will be catastrophic to this community."

Sparks Mayor Geno Martini, whose city's industrial area is among the most at risk from floods, said future floods are inevitable before the project is completed. Once approved, construction of the entire project is expected to take from 10 to 15 years.

"We'll definitely flood before we get this done, maybe repeatedly," Martini said.

As the federal review continues, local government agencies continue to build components of the larger flood strategy with local funds. Multimillion-dollar projects completed or under way include construction of a levee and floodwall protecting the Reno-Sparks

Indian Colony and restoration of downstream stretches of the Truckee River at the Mustang and 102 ranches and at Lockwood.

Local officials have discussed the possibility of separating from the Army Corps and building whatever flood protections are possible with local funding alone.

But because well-intentioned changes made by the federal government to the Truckee River decades ago are largely responsible for problems with the river today, some federal role is clearly justified, Larkin said.

"The Army Corps of Engineers caused this problem in the beginning," Larkin said. "The question becomes just how much participation the federal government should have in fixing a problem they caused."