

Flood project committee OKs plan for 2010-2011

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Tribune file/Debra Reid - Tokala Chasing Crow, left, and her Paiute relatives inspected a new flood wall on Reno-Sparks Indian Colony land in September. The wall will serve as flood protection for a new Wal-Mart under construction also on tribal land.

RENO — With cautious optimism, the Truckee River Flood Project Coordinating Committee on Friday approved a budget plan for 2010-2011 that will allocate about \$6 million — the amount of revenue anticipated for the year — on projects and land purchases.

Meanwhile, project administrators will continue to work on how to keep the project moving despite logistical lagging by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Project director Naomi Duerr is hopeful that the project participants will agree on the terms of forming a joint powers authority (JPA) in July to implement a regional fee by January 2011. This fee will enable the local project to progress without up front federal money.

Years of changes to project plans and environmental assessments have slowed the planning down at the federal level. The project, which is estimated to cost \$1.6 billion, is a regional effort to restore the Truckee River and build flood protection structures to prevent such flooding as occurred in 1997 and caused more than \$1 billion in damage.

Local government has to pick up the tab for between \$400 and \$500 million of the project via a 1/8-cent sales tax levied county-wide, grants and possible additional fees as agreed upon by local governments. Sparks residents pay \$5.41 each month along with their sewer bill to pay for the North Truckee Drain portion of the project — an amount that would not go up under a JPA, Duerr added. She said roughly \$200 million of the local contribution must be used to buy land for the project.

In September, flood project and community leaders marked the completion of a flood wall and levee near the Grand Sierra Resort. The earthen levee and concrete flood wall each extend approximately 1,200 feet along the river's south bank, meeting at a point 100 yards up from the water. The barrier borders a chunk of land at the northeast intersection of Glendale Avenue and

U.S. 395 that was one of the sites of major flooding on Jan. 1, 1997.

Projects such as this one are completed ahead of full federal approval, Duerr said, through "placeholder approvals." Under federal guidelines, groups working on a comprehensive flood project are allowed to proceed ahead of the planning process to get flood damage reduction projects built sooner. Credit for funds spent will be given by the Army Corps of Engineers once the project is formally approved by Congress.

Forming a JPA, similar to the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, will enable the project to enact a fee to raise the remainder of the local share of money for the project. The JPA would cover the cities of Sparks and Reno, unincorporated Washoe County and some agricultural land owned by the University of Nevada, Reno.

County Commissioner Bob Larkin, who represents much of the unincorporated area near Sparks and sits on the flood committee, said it is important for the project to continue in case of another flood. If that happens, he said, 25,000 jobs in the Sparks will be lost because businesses there will literally go under from the damage.

"They'll be out of business," he said. "It's not like they can close their doors for one or two days."