

# Money dries up for flood projects

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With money running out, a coalition of officials agreed Friday to continue locally financed flood-control improvements but voiced frustration over delays in federal approval of a larger Truckee River flood project.

The strategy endorsed by the Flood Project Coordinating Committee would continue spending local money to build selected projects ahead of the larger plan, projected to cost as much as \$1.6 billion.

The projects include elevation of about 20 homes in Hidden Valley to protect them from flooding at a cost of \$2 million, construction of a raised walkway to block floodwaters at Rainbow Bend at \$1.5 million, and studies for a levee at Wadsworth and restoration of a pond at Tracy at \$450,000.

Another \$5 million would be set aside for land purchases, including portions of the riverbank downstream of Greg Street where terracing and levee construction are planned.

At a committee retreat, Flood Project Director Naomi Duerr warned officials that sales tax revenue available for flood work is close to being depleted. Much of available tax revenue, nearly \$45 million, has been spent in recent years to buy property needed for the broader flood-control strategy. Projects completed or under way include construction of a levee protecting the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony and three lower river restoration efforts.

"The bad news: We're out of cash," Duerr said. "Unless we identify another revenue source, this will really be the last year we can tackle new projects."

Reno, Sparks and Washoe County plan to form a joint powers authority as soon as July that could assess local tolls and fees to pay for flood improvements, but money wouldn't start being collected until early 2011 and might not be available for spending until later.

Federal review of the larger flood control strategy continues. Last month, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced that modeling errors would delay congressional authorization of the project -- and approval of the first federal money to pay for flood protection -- until late 2012 at the soonest.

Local officials, who support a "living river" flood strategy that relies less on levees and floodwalls than other proposals, criticized the latest in a series of delays.

"We need to start moving forward with these projects that are going to protect our community," said Washoe County Commissioner Bob Larkin. "We know the (Sparks) industrial area is going to flood. We know downtown Reno is going to flood. There are some parts to this we need to move forward."

Officials are examining what parts of the larger project might be able to proceed under flood improvements authorized by Congress in 1988 that were never built. But Roger Henderson, project manager for the Army Corps, warned against taking any action that might imperil federal approval of the project now under review.

Henderson said he understands frustration over ongoing delays.

"To be honest with you, I would love to get this thing built tomorrow," Henderson said.

Reno Councilman Dan Gustin emphasized the need to proceed with whatever work is possible in the short-term to provide needed jobs and boost an ailing economy.

"We need to put people back to work right now," Gustin said.