

## THE OPINION OF THE RGJ EDITORIAL BOARD

# Bill gets us closer to protecting the valley against another flood

As each year has passed without a major flood in the Truckee Meadows and memories of the New Year Flood of 1997 faded, there has been a danger that the community's resolve to ensure that such a disastrous event never happened again might dissolve.

That's why Senate Bill 175, approved by the Legislature on the final day of the session and signed by Gov. Jim Gibbons on Monday, is so important to the future of the Reno-Sparks area.

The bill, which will allow Washoe County to create a control authority with the power to, yes, levy fees to pay for the community-designed flood-control project, is the next logical step in a process that began more than 12 years ago as the Truckee Meadows dried out from the biggest flood in recent memory.

That flood caused an estimated \$1 billion in damage when the Truckee River overflowed its banks in downtown Reno and the Sparks industrial area. Homes in the Rosewood Lakes and Hidden Valley area were flooded, as were parts of Reno-Tahoe International Airport.

Flood officials estimate that a repeat of the 1997 flood could cause \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion in damage today.

The plan that was developed through a lengthy public process returns the Truckee River to something closer to its natural state. It provides, where possible, more flood plain to allow it to spread out rather than back up when there's too much water in the channel.

East of Sparks, the project includes restoring the river's winding path through the canyon to slow its descent to Pyramid Lake. It also restores riparian areas along the river, providing new habitat for wildlife as well as preventing flooding.

Where that's not possible, the



MARILYN NEWTON/RGJ FILE

Two men wade near baggage containers under the belly of an American 757 in 1997 as flood waters rise at Reno-Tahoe International Airport.

## SNAPSHOT

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project will build new flood walls. One is already under construction just north of Glendale Avenue, in a joint effort of the flood project, the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony and Wal-Mart.

Finally, there eventually will be new bridges over the Truckee River in downtown Reno. The existing bridges act as dams when water is high, trapping debris and sending water over the river's banks. New designs will increase the capacity of the bridges, allowing more water to pass under them and letting debris keep moving.

None of this comes cheaply, however. When the flood control project officials finally manage to cut the federal red tape and money is appropriated, the Army Corps of Engineers will pay most of the cost of the \$1.5-billion project, but we need to raise about \$400 million to pay the local portion. (Work so far has been

funded by a one-eighth cent sales tax approved by voters.)

SB175 is critical to that effort.

Until the last minute, however, it looked like the bill might not be approved. It somehow got caught up in the debate over an amendment implementing a water-planning measure for Washoe County that senators opposed and the governor threatened to veto.

Thankfully, the differences were resolved before the Legislature adjourned last week, and SB175 is now law.

Now, local flood project officials can show the Corps of Engineers that we are holding up our end of the deal, that we are serious about the need to complete this project and are willing to pay the price necessary to see it to completion.

We know that the Truckee River will flood again. The next time it does, we need to be ready. With SB175, we're getting closer.