



Letter: Diversion sponsors dismiss more acceptable options

By Lyle E. Hovland from Rothsay, Minn. on Jul 7, 2015 at 12:26 a.m.

I must respond to recent opinions by Clay Dietrich, president of the Fargo-Moorhead Home Builders Association and Jim Nyhoff, mayor of Oxbow.

Both decry the uncertainty and harm supposedly faced by the residents of Oxbow and the building tradespeople because of the recent federal injunction upheld by a federal judge.

Nowhere do I hear or read of the uncertainty and harm brought upon upstream residents and communities by the dam and diversion as currently proposed. Their homes, farms, livelihoods, heritage, communities, schools, infrastructure, churches, cemeteries and future growth are all most certainly at great risk and will be subject to flooding should the dam and diversion be put in place as proposed.

The upstream people, in most instances, do not currently have flooding issues. The Diversion Authority and city of Fargo seem to have no qualms about displacing 50 square miles of flood plain for future development and pushing their self-made problems (i.e., permitting construction in flood plains) onto others. The upstream people are basically told to “suck it up and get out of the way.” For Dietrich to characterize upstream people, fighting to save their homes, farms and communities as “actively plotting to destroy actions to protect our homes and cities” is really disingenuous. That implies that upstream people and their homes are of less value and are more expendable than those downstream who choose to buy or build in flood-prone areas or active flood plains.

The Diversion Authority and Oxbow were repeatedly told to allow for, follow a process and wait for the final Environmental Impact Statement by the Department of Natural Resources. They refused to do that, kept building and diking and kept the cart well in front of the horse and when the federal injunction, rightly, brought them up short, they are complaining.

This is a problem of their own making. The federal judge referred to it as “a bureaucratic steamroller effect” and chose to bring them up short to allow for the correct process to take place.

I can understand the concern of the building tradespeople, but there should have been some caution on their part to not get caught up in premature ventures.

No one I know is opposed to appropriate flood protection for Fargo and Moorhead, and that has been stated repeatedly. There is a great difference of opinion on how that is best achieved and at what cost to whom. We, the Richland/Wilkin JPA, and the upstream coalition have offered, numerous times, to discuss and explore options that would be less harmful and more mutually acceptable, but those offers are either ignored or belittled by the DA and the corps. It seems to be “their way or the highway,” so there are no solutions sought that all can come together to support.

I hope for more constructive dialogue in the future, but I have little optimism at this time.

Hovland, Rothsay, Minn., is a Wilkin County commissioner and vice chairman, Richland/Wilkin Joint Powers Authority.