



McFeely: Diversion task force going back to the future

By [Mike McFeely](#) on Oct 29, 2017 at 8:10 p.m.



Congratulations to Govs. Doug Burgum of North Dakota and Mark Dayton of Minnesota for inventing a time machine that turns back the clock seven years. It is called the F-M Diversion Task Force, a 16-person committee that spent one of its precious few meetings airing past grievances and asking questions that were answered years ago.

If there was any sense of urgency from this herd of cats in trying to solve a highly contentious fight over a mind-bendingly complex and expensive project to protect Fargo-Moorhead from a catastrophic Red River flood, you wouldn't know it by the news reported last week. We learned upstream opponents of the diversion want to rehash grudges they've been griping about since the current iteration of the project gained steam in 2010 and they wondered again, for about the 383rd time, why a solution that isn't a solution can't be a solution.

And then there was Dayton himself, a longtime critic of the diversion who likes to play to the upstream barkers, who asked if it was true the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers really looked at 70 alternatives to the big ditch. When told yes, that is true, the governor seemed surprised. Yo, Mark, where have you been for seven years? It's sorta common knowledge around these parts that ring dikes, holding ponds and fairy dust can't provide the same flood protection as a diversion.

Or didn't Rep. Collin Peterson's farmer buddies from Wilkin County tell you that?

This first meeting illustrates the near-impossibility of finding some sort of compromise in the tight timeline leading up to Dec. 15, the deadline set for the task force to find a path forward on a \$2.2 billion project that took seven years to reach this point. Somehow we're supposed to believe that a disparate group of hastily assembled partisans, in some cases not as informed as they should be, can hold hands and sing "Kumbaya" around the campfire and get 'er done in fewer than 60 days.

Have you been following the words and deeds of harsh diversion opponents like Richland County Commissioner Nathan Berseth, attorney Tim Fox and Moorhead City Council member Heidi Durand? Fairy dust might be the best hope, after all.

Much will depend on Dayton and his surrogate, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources commissioner Tom Landwehr. The governor talks a good game, saying things like "failure is not an option" and other such empty sound bites, but his lack of support for the diversion is the main reason why the task force and two governors are meeting a handful of times to try to solve a heretofore unsolvable issue. If Dayton demands unanimity from Minnesota opponents before agreeing on a compromise, this is going nowhere.

Does anybody think Fox, who believes the Corps is lying about flood elevation levels, is going to be persuaded to support a flood-control project he imagines is based on a false assumption? Fox's, and others', fundamental opposition to the diversion is that it's based on a lie. How do they get past that?

The next task force meeting is scheduled Wednesday, Nov. 1. Burgum had to remind Fox at the first meeting that the task force's job is "not about litigating the past. It's about defining our future." Hopefully diversion opponents leave the time machine at home for the next meeting.

Not even that will guarantee success with this group of people. Memo to the diversion supporters and/or cynics in the room: Somebody bring the fairy dust.



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