

## Forum editorial: The corps apparently tone deaf

A few months ago, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released a report that concluded that the proposed North Dakota flood control diversion would dump several feet of additional water on communities downstream on the Red River. The numbers were startling. The report immediately galvanized downstream landowners and community leaders, who came out fiercely against the diversion. No surprise in that reaction.

Last week the corps dropped another monkey wrench into the gears of the diversion machinery with a revised plan that would store water upstream in holding areas that could put several feet of water into established communities just south of Fargo. The uproar from potentially affected homeowners and landowners reverberated across the metro area.

The corps certainly has a job to do, but its proposed solutions to the diversion's projected impacts seem designed to scuttle the project. The "policies" corps spokesmen use to justify their project options and limitations are eroding support for a diversion. That might not be the corps' aim, but when mitigation proposals generate such anger both upstream and downstream, something is not right.

That's not all. West Fargo officials are justifiably furious because they believe they were sold a bill of goods regarding alignment of the diversion right of way. There never was a firm commitment to move the channel route a couple of miles west of Horace and West Fargo so more land would be clear of flooding and thus open to development (the corps says it can't locate a project for development purposes). But there also was never a clear rejection of a western corridor. It apparently was a viable option - a line on the map - until last week's meeting of the Metro Flood Study Work Group, when the corps said the west alignment is less environmentally friendly.

Very little seems clear at this point. The corps and engineering firms are reworking models of downstream impact, which suggests the corps'

frightening projections were premature. Locations of proposed upstream holding basins have not been determined, which suggests the corps needlessly upset close-in upstream neighborhoods. Local engineers say federal agencies don't have all the information needed to conclude that a western diversion alignment is not feasible, which suggests the corps' data is faulty or incomplete.

No one said a project of this magnitude and complexity would be easy or without controversy. But the indispensable lead federal partner is displaying a kind of public relations tone deafness that threatens the entire enterprise.

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