

Latest diversion project for Fargo-Moorhead faces fierce opposition

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Kindred, N.D.

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A proposed Red River diversion project to ease flooding for Fargo-Moorhead is running into stiff opposition.

The Army Corps of Engineers holds public meetings about the project this week. On Tuesday, hundreds of residents who live outside of Fargo-Moorhead turned out to voice opposition to the project in a hearing in Kindred, N.D.

A proposed diversion project for Fargo-Moorhead would flood several small upstream communities and thousands of acres of farm land. Hundreds of people would be relocated to make room for a large area to hold water during a flood.

Rural resident June Skari brought loud applause with her comments about the project.

"We don't want to move," she said. "We don't want to be bought out. We want to be left alone. Why can't Fargo dike the city of Fargo and leave us alone?"

Fargo Deputy Mayor Tim Mahoney responded that a diversion is the only viable long-term solution to flooding in Fargo-Moorhead.



A crowd of more than 300 gathered in the Kindred, N.D school gym on Tuesday, May 24, 2011 to voice their opposition to a proposed Red River diversion designed to reduce flooding in Fargo-Moorhead. Many in the crowd said the \$1.7 billion project would force them out of homes or off farms. MPR Photo/Dan Gunderson

"We're listening to you," Mahoney said. "We're just as concerned. Who would want anybody to lose their farm or move off their farm or move out of their home? Nobody. The problem is the solution of diking Fargo doesn't work. It doesn't go high enough. So you need a diversion."

This diversion plan is a second attempt by the Army Corps of Engineers. The first diversion plan would have caused increased flooding downstream, affecting communities all the way to the Canadian border.

Corps officials said that level of impact was unacceptable. So it revised the plan to create water storage upstream.

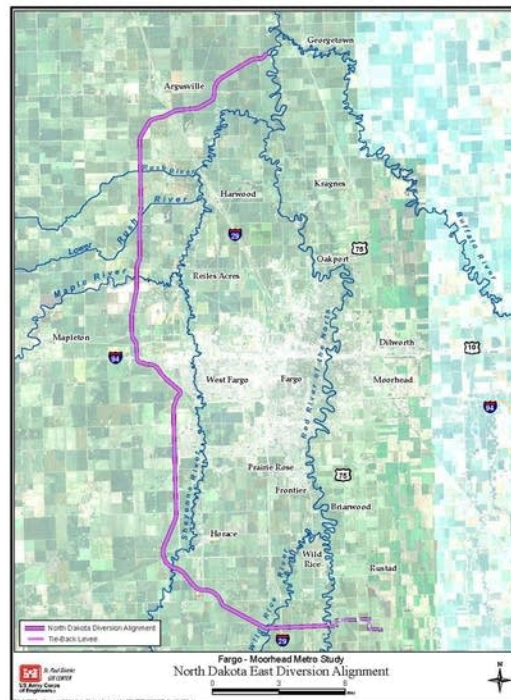
That solved the problem of creating worse flooding downstream, but it increased the project cost by 42 percent to \$1.7 billion. And it would require moving people like Neal Roesler out of their homes.

"My home in Bakke addition will have 6 to 8 feet of water above the ground level," he said.



Neal Roesler (right) attended a public meeting Tuesday evening in Kindred, N.D., to voice opposition to a proposed Red River diversion channel to ease flooding in Fargo-Moorhead. Roesler says if the project is built, he would be forced out of his home. MPR Photo/Dan Gunderson

Figure 16 - North Dakota East diversion alignment



The purple line shows the proposed route of a diversion around Fargo-Moorhead. The diversion would be 35 miles long and cross five streams, 18 roads and four rail lines. Graphic courtesy of US Army Corps of Engineers

Roesler wore a bright green construction worker's vest to draw attention to efforts to stop the diversion project. He said property owners are paralyzed by the looming project.

"It means our property is not salable, and I'm in limbo as to doing any home improvements, any yard improvements," Roesler said. "I'm stuck."

Many residents fear they won't get a fair price for their homes. Jim Nyhof, the mayor of Oxbow, N.D., a community of 110 homes built around a golf course south of Fargo, said homes in his community are already sitting empty because people have moved and can't sell the property. Banks, he said, won't give mortgages.

Nyhof said his community could be on the bubble for years while the diversion project works its way through Congress.

"To think we may have to wait for 10 to 15 years for a project to be funded or authorized," he said. "Oxbow would be a ghost town."

The Army Corps of Engineers plans to have the project ready for congressional consideration by the end of this year.

If Congress authorizes and funds the \$1.7 billion project, construction would start in 2013 and last about eight years.



Several people attending a public meeting about the proposed Fargo Moorhead diversion project wore construction worker vests with this logo. They say the diversion project would create a dam that would hold water back and flood their homes upstream of Fargo Moorhead. MPR Photo/Dan Gunderson