

OPINION

## Forum editorial: Diversion must be priority

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No one we know wants Fargo-Moorhead's flood protection diversion to damage the neighbors. But in order to permanently protect from flooding the region's largest population, education, business, transportation, entertainment, health care and cultural urban center, there will be consequences. That reality, however harsh, is the motivation for opposition to the project among nearby rural and suburban residents.

The opposition is necessarily and legitimately self-serving. People who find their homes and businesses in the proposed path of the diversion have every right to be upset. They have every right to fight it vigorously. Many of them are doing just that.

Opposing the project to save one's home and way of life is one thing. It is quite another, however, to disseminate misrepresentations. For example, the most recent howl is that the diversion is not the best way to protect the urban center from flooding. That's just not so. Options have been examined thoroughly. They include levees, upstream retention and moving city properties out of the river's floodplain. All make sense, but only in the context of the diversion. All the work Fargo and Moorhead have done since 1997 will complement, not substitute for, a diversion. There is no convincing argument otherwise.

Secondly, the complaint that Fargo and Moorhead have not sacrificed anything for flood control is either a purposeful lie or ignorance. The number of homes and other properties lost to buyouts is in the hundreds. Each home "sacrificed" to flood control levees or floodways represents a family, the loss of a way of life along the river, the trauma of relocating. That process is still under way. It's an insult to perpetuate the fiction that residents of the cities have not sacrificed because of flood projects.

Finally, the importance of Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo to the economic well-being of the region cannot be minimized. Much of the development outside the city - and potentially in the zone of

the diversion - exists only because of the economic engine of the cities. Upward of 40 percent of residents in nearby counties (higher in some rural and outlying suburban areas) commute to Fargo for work. There would be no rural subdivisions without easy access to the amenities of the city. Small towns within a short commute to Fargo are thriving because smart leadership sold them as bedroom communities: small-town living close to the attractions of the city. If Fargo suffers a catastrophic flood, the entire region - including those bedroom towns and rural subdivisions - will take the hit, too.

F-M needs the diversion. The drive to fund and build it must not be slowed down. Rather, it should be accelerated. After all, Red River Valley residents know major flooding is a sure thing. The past three crests on the Red River are in the top 10 floods of modern times.

Meanwhile, project planners must negotiate the best possible deals for those who will - who will - be dislocated and otherwise negatively impacted by the diversion. But the priority must be advancing the project.

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