



E. John Carlson, Published June 01 2011

Diversion supporters ignore sensible, cheaper alternatives

I attended the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Draft Feasibility EIS public meeting for the proposed Red River F-M diversion plan at the Kindred High School on May 24. I witnessed the charade that was thrust upon the residents of Oxbow, Bakke Subdivision, Hickson, Christine, Comstock, etc., that what we thought even mattered.

Good comments and proposals for alternative considerations were met with casual disregard, and it was readily apparent that nothing else was going to be considered because it would frustrate corps timelines for proposing their bizarre plan to Congress.

I heard John Hertsgaard of Richland County make an eloquent description of an alternative 400,000-to-500,000-acre-feet-of-water storage plan north of Fargo, being proposed in the farm bill by Rep. Collin Peterson of Minnesota, that appears to preclude the necessity to inundate our upstream communities with the corps-proposed water-staging plan. This sound proposal was granted no consideration.

The corps has repeatedly demonstrated a bureaucratic inability to manage relatively simple flood-control projects such as the Baldhill Dam at Valley City, N.D., and now the Garrison Dam north of Bismarck, which has resulted in the corps creating flooding for both of these communities. The press has given little mention of these facts. These examples do not instill any confidence in me or anyone else that the corps can even begin to manage a much more complex plan that is being proposed here.

The corps maps, charts and graphs all look great on paper and PowerPoint presentations, but these don't work well when under 6 feet of water. Further, the corps and Fargo, et al insist on a 500-year flood-control plan. Does anyone realize that if they were to succeed in this, no one else in the Red River Valley would survive?

The Grand Forks plan started out as a diversion plan in 1997 but ended up primarily a floodwall-protected greenway that created 250-year protection at a much lower cost. Does anyone realize that we have a greater probability of having an earthquake in Fargo than a 500-year flood event? Two hundred fifty years is not good enough?

What about cost? The recent half-cent sales tax that was hoodwinked through an election last fall will produce only

\$200 million in revenue. The current corps plan was unveiled after the election, and strong evidence suggests the

corps knew of this water-storage plan before the election but did not reveal it because of the negative impact it would have had. The proposed diversion is at a current estimate of \$1.73 billion and keeps rising because costs keep creeping in due to omission and errors, and it is readily apparent that this thing is going to cost upward of \$3 billion to

\$4 billion before it is done. We're talking about things like raising 30 miles of Interstate 29, railroad tracks, Highway 75, etc. Who is going to pay for all of this?

Fargo and the corps intend to forge ahead with this plan whether the funding is readily available or not, and it will force untenable special assessments or whatever upon affected (benefited!?) residents who do not understand this yet.

Fargo needs flood protection. I grew up there and make my livelihood there, as do many others, and we all know the obvious value of Fargo as an economic hub, etc. As Fargo long awaits this corps project, it will be forced to continue building and raising dikes and buying out floodway homes. I maintain the long wait will force the city to solve its own problem with its own created protection and accept something lower than a 500-year protection level – which is good enough.

I would ask all concerned to encourage Fargo officials to accept less than 500-year flood control to prevent unacceptable costs to residents and save our communities south of Fargo.