

NEWS

UPDATED: Opponents urge look at retention-diversion combo

HICKSON, N.D. - Opponents of the Red River diversion's so-called "dam and reservoir" components will hold a news conference today to call attention to what they believe is a better option that won't flood their property upstream of Fargo-Moorhead.

Written By: news@inforum.com | Nov 16th 2011 - 11pm.

HICKSON, N.D. - Opponents of the Red River diversion's so-called "dam and reservoir" components will hold a news conference today to call attention to what they believe is a better option that won't flood their property upstream of Fargo-Moorhead.

Establishing multiple water storage areas farther upstream in conjunction with an F-M diversion channel would have the same desired effect for flood protection, but without the "dam" that would hold back water on thousands of acres south of the metro, Nathan Berseth said.

"The major point is there are alternatives out there that would still protect Fargo without the devastation of hundreds of homes," said Berseth, spokesman for the MnDak Upstream Coalition.

In a news release announcing today's 2 p.m. news conference at the Hickson Community Center, upstream groups said details of an Army Corps of Engineers study and a Red River Basin Commission draft study on basinwide flood solutions show upstream retention "could make the dam and reservoir portion of the project unnecessary."

The basin commission's draft report states that 1.5 million acre-feet of "appropriately placed storage" would be needed to achieve a 20 percent flow reduction of 1997 peak flows on the Red River - reducing the river level by 2.3 feet in Fargo-Moorhead. Berseth said that's an even greater impact on downstream flow reduction than the diversion's proposed "dam" - a control structure on the Red River with three gates 50 feet wide and 47 feet high - and 200,000 acre-feet of storage south of Fargo-Moorhead.

Corps of Engineers project manager Aaron Snyder said the corps did consider upstream storage as part of the diversion project. And while retention could reduce flows 20 percent during a 1997 event, the benefit wouldn't be as great across all flood events, he said.

"Generally, upstream storage is something that could be good, but it definitely will not really reduce the need for the diversion channel," Snyder said. "And as the diversion's currently designed, it would not really reduce the staging and storage area. It would only reduce the frequency of operation of the project."

Diversion Authority co-chairman Darrell Vanyo said members support additional retention projects. But identifying and securing 1.5 million acre-feet of storage would take "decades," he said, noting the 60,000-acre-foot Maple River Dam north of Lisbon took more than two decades from inception to completion.

With the region still in a wet cycle, "I don't know that we can afford to wait 10, 15 years for that integrated solution, then start executing a plan that'll take another 15 years," Vanyo said.

The Corps of Engineers, which is designing the diversion with the help of local consultants, doesn't tackle basinwide solution projects and would have to address each retention project on an individual basis, Vanyo said.

"It's not going to be rolled into this massive project for federal funding, I'll guarantee you that," he said.

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