

LETTERS

Hulett: It's time to end opposition to the F-M Diversion

Written By: Mike Hulett | Feb 15th 2020 - 7am.



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Fargo-Moorhead residents live with a flood threat that is historically life-threatening and economically-crippling. The health and welfare of over 235,000 citizens residing, working and studying within the protected area of the FM Diversion Project are at risk. Also at risk is the security of tens of thousands of homes and businesses, multiple schools and churches, and large cemeteries.

Folks residing in upstream areas are holding up the project with multiple lawsuits. One must assume they have highly substantial reasons to justify blocking a solution for potentially life-threatening disasters. Here is the justification given by the Richland Wilkin Joint Powers Authority: “The Diversion Authority is taking more than 30,000 acres out of the natural floodplain so developers and homebuilders can make more money. Churches are being displaced and cemeteries are being flooded.”

Forum reporting does indicate a few upstream buildings will need to be moved to higher ground, but there are no indications the F-M Diversion project will result in substantial risk to the health, welfare and safety of upstream residents. The assertion that the diversion is a scheme to line the pockets of developers and homebuilders is ill-founded. Most of the protected area is previously developed land.

Had the diversion project been in place over the last 100 years of recorded flood history, the upstream staging area in question would have seen additional water in about five events, for a total estimated additional inundation period of 28 days out of 365,000 days.

Based on data from an independent study by North Dakota State University, future impacts to agricultural production will be infrequent and minimized. Limited upstream impacts on primarily agricultural land will be mitigated through the payment of a flowage easement to landowners. The diversion project prioritizes the protection of critical infrastructure and life safety and is required to mitigate impacts on the upstream residents.

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JPA and upstream residents' concerns have previously been addressed in a major way. In 2018, North Dakota Gov. Burgum and Minnesota Gov. Dayton formed a 16-member task force with geographically and politically diverse membership, including members from Minnesota and North Dakota, and from Grand Forks to Richland and Wilkin Counties. The original diversion project was modified based upon recommendations from the task force. The reconfigured project was submitted for a new Minnesota permit in early 2018 and a supplemental environmental impact study was conducted. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources approved a permit for Plan B in December of 2018 that included support from the governors and the task force.

The efficiency and effectiveness of the Diversion Authority has been enhanced by the employment of Executive Director Joel Paulsen. Funding sources continue to fall into place. Over 350 properties and 50% of the land needed to construct the diversion channel have been fairly acquired. Diversion opponents surely understand that the project will ultimately be completed. It is time for them to end their lawsuits.

Let us pray that the potential flood of 2020 is not the future disaster we have been working so hard to eradicate with a completed diversion.

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