

One more step toward J Levee restoration

By Heather Hacking - ChicoER Staff Writer

Posted: 07/03/2013 12:41:07 AM PDT

source: http://www.chicoer.com/news/ci_23590171/one-more-step-toward-j-levee-restoration

HAMILTON CITY — The Sacramento River still flows. The J Levee that protects Hamilton City remains in terrible condition. Yet, there is cause for celebration on the west side of the river.

The long-awaited plans to restore the levee and provide wildlife habitat made it through the Senate Appropriations Committee this week.

That's the furthest the process has reached, despite being in President Barack Obama's budget for new projects the past two years.

This year the president earmarked \$15 million through the budget of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Yet, federal legislators have been resistant to fund new projects until previously approved projects are completed.

The hope is that the House and Senate subcommittees will hash things out during the budget conference in the fall, and Hamilton City's project will not end up being crossed off the list.

The restoration project has more of a chance than it did the past two years, said Lee Ann Grigsby-Puente, who leads Reclamation District 2140, which includes an assessment of landowners.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein has been a real champion of the cause, Grigsby-Puente said, and representatives John Garamendi, D-Fairfield, and Doug LaMalfa, R-Richvale, have also supported the plan.

"This is as far as we've gotten. This is great news," Grigsby-Puente said excitedly.

Glenn County Supervisor Leigh McDaniel agreed.

"It's through the subcommittee. That's a really big deal," he said.

The levee, built in the early 1900s, failed twice in the 1970s and has required emergency reinforcement five times since 1983.

The plan includes a \$52.4-million project, with 6.8 miles of set-back levees, 1,450 acres of flood plain and 1,361 acres of habitat restoration.

The \$15 million being discussed would pay for the first phase.

To read a fact sheet on the project prepared last year: <http://goo.gl/eIU9R> .

"To me, we really dodged a bullet," last year, McDaniel said. The early part of January was extremely wet, which had 1,800 residents and nearby landowners very worried.

The situation is a "really dangerous game of chicken with the federal government," McDaniel continued.

The sad part is that repairing flood damage would cost much more than the cost of levee improvement, the supervisor said.

Reach Heather Hacking at 896-7758, hhacking@chicoer.com, or on Twitter [@HeatherHacking](https://twitter.com/HeatherHacking).