

Hamilton City J levee funding in president's budget

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The Hamilton City J levee project received a \$8.5 million boost through President Barack Obama's 2017 budget, reported U.S. Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Richvale.

The funding adds to the \$31 million in federal funds the Hamilton City Flood Damage Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration Project has already secured to protect over 2,000 residents from flooding.

Flood dangers from the Sacramento River have forced the evacuation of Hamilton City six times since 1980, and the existing levee provides protection from only 10-year flood events, not the 200-year flood event protection required by law, LaMalfa announced on the House floor last week.

Portions of Hamilton City and the surrounding area flooded in 1974. Extensive flood fighting has been necessary in 1983, 1986, 1995, 1997, and 1998 to avoid failure of the private J levee.

Residents of the town were evacuated six times in the past 20 years: 1983, 1986, twice in 1995, 1997, and 1998.

"This additional \$8.5 million in funding will allow major progress on a project that will protect the homes and families of Hamilton City residents," said LaMalfa, who represents the state's First Congressional District. "Working with local residents who've contributed their own money toward the project, this funding will bring the total federal support for this project to over \$39 million so far. I'll be working to ensure that these funds are made available quickly so that Hamilton City can finally have some peace of mind."

A study revealed the J levee does not meet government or any other levee construction standards and could fail at river levels well below the top of the levee.

The original J levee was built in 1904 by the Holly Sugar Company to protect farmland against a 10-year flood.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and The Reclamation Board of the State of California completed a feasibility study in 2004 to develop plans to reduce flood damages and restore the ecosystem along the Sacramento River near Hamilton City.

The Hamilton City Flood Damage Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration Project is set to enhance flood protection for Hamilton City through a multi-component plan: Construction of a setback levee to provide a more reliable form of flood protection to the community and agricultural areas; and degradation of the existing J levee to allow for reconnection of the river to the flood plain; and restoration of about 1,500 acres of native habitat between the new setback levee and the Sacramento River.

The construction and maintenance of a training dike at the Capay Unit is part of the plan as well.

According to the Army Corps' current plan, the southern half of the project will be constructed first, with the northern half to start this year. Construction in this fashion will minimize the risk to the town from any flooding event which may occur before construction is finished.

Assuming appropriate levels of future funding are made available, major construction should be finished by 2018.

Of the \$52.4 million estimated cost for the construction project, it is reported \$34.1 million would come from federal funding, and \$18.3 million from state and local funding.

To offset Hamilton City's share of the costs, a deal was developed through The Nature Conservancy to donate land along the river for habitat restoration.

In addition, Reclamation District 2140 was awarded a grant of up to \$5 million from the state, which in combination with other sources should be sufficient to cover the complete non-federal share of costs.