

More Prop 1E money for Yuba levee work

[By Howard Yune/Appeal-Democrat](#)

2009-10-21 12:44:59

As flood-control authorities prepare to celebrate the completion of a levee replacement in Yuba County, funds are on the way to help fill the last links in a fortified levee chain.

The Three Rivers Levee Improvement Authority has received \$47.5 million in state bond money to upgrade five miles of levees along the upper Yuba River. Together with about \$20 million of local funding, the bond funds will pay for raising levee standards to guard against a 200-year peak flood — and TRLIA officials hope the new protection will head off flood-insurance hikes and building curbs by keeping much of Yuba County out of federal flood-risk zones.

"I think this is everything when it comes to our future," said Mary Jane Griego, TRLIA board chair and a Yuba County supervisor.

TRLIA is currently going through an environmental review of the \$67.5 million Yuba River levee project, which will include seepage control, corrections to slope geometry, and erosion protection. Two sections along the Yuba will receive the upgrades, from Simpson Road to the Yuba Goldfields and from Highway 70 to the North Beale Road area in Linda.

The state funding comes from Proposition 1E, a bond program that voters approved in 2006 to provide \$4 billion for flood protection improvements. TRLIA will cover the remaining \$20 million needed for funding the project, which the agency says it has through reimbursements and credits from prior construction work, and development funds.

Construction on the upper Yuba is slated to start next summer, with completion planned in the fall of 2010 or spring 2011, TRLIA's executive director, Paul Brunner, said Wednesday.

The agency previously received \$138.5 million in Prop 1E money for levee improvements along the Feather River, where TRLIA is completing a 13-mile upgrade. That campaign includes a new six-mile setback levee from Star Bend to Shanghai Bend to bypass the existing flood wall, which construction crews are now dismantling.

A dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Feather River project is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Monday at Star Bend in Yuba County.

Altogether, the agency's projects cover 29 miles of levees along the Yuba, Feather and Bear Rivers along with the Western Pacific Interceptor Canal.

After the completion of the Yuba River upgrades, TRLIA will apply to the Federal Emergency Management Agency to certify the rebuilt levees as providing 200-year flood protection, according to Brunner.

FEMA's assent would let Yuba County homeowners dodge the sharp hikes in flood insurance premiums that began taking effect across the river in Sutter County, starting in December 2008 south of Stewart Road. In the next two years the north county and south Butte County

are expected to see the same increases, the result of FEMA no longer listing local levees as flood-worthy. The Sutter Butte Flood Control Agency does not expect to complete its own levee fixes before 2014.

Griego, the TRLIA chair, called the bolstered levees a safeguard not just for home and buildings but for Yuba County's economy, pointing to the tax revenue losses that followed the 1986 and 1997 floods that ravaged the Peach Tree Mall in Linda and other businesses.

"We saw something almost never seen in California then — negative growth," she recalled. "People and businesses picked up and left because they'd lost confidence in our ability to keep them safe. What happened at the mall, those were jobs that went somewhere else; most of those we saw march right over the bridge into Yuba City.

"We've had a very hard time trying to catch up, but at least now we're on the right track."

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