



Sacramento Bee

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Flood control fight -- a matter of perspective

Dam at the heart of Doolittle's vision

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - Is the third time a charm for an Auburn dam in the 1990s?

Rocklin Republican Rep. John Doolittle thinks so. After Congress defeated proposals to build a dam on the American River's north fork in 1992 and 1996, he is back with a smaller but no less controversial plan.

It is contained in legislation, HR 4111, that is competing with a ri-

val bill by Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento, for Congress' blessing as the best flood-protection plan for Sacramento.

Doolittle's measure is backed by GOP Reps. Richard Pombo of Tracy and Wally Herger of Marysville, but Matsui is highly critical because the plan is not supported by any in-depth re-

Please see DOOLITTLE, page A22



John Doolittle

Matsui's convinced higher levees safe

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - Two and a half feet of dirt and clay.

That, on average, is what would be added on top of existing lower American River levees if Democratic Rep. Robert Matsui, Sacramento flood control authorities and many local elected officials have their way.

That is also what Rep. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, and his allies do not want to see fused to those

Please see MATSUI, page A22



Robert Matsui

levees, which they charge would result in unstable and unsafe structures prone to breaks.

It is that material and the repercussions of higher levees that sit at the vortex of a raging dispute between the two congressmen and officials in the Sacramento region.

The levee-raising plan is a key

Doolittle:

Dam plan draws fire over a lack of detailed studies

Exhibit: X-31

Continued from page A1
search. It would authorize:

- Construction of a flood control dam where an earthen cofferdam was erected in 1975 to divert water around the site of the Auburn dam. The Auburn dam project stalled in the late 1970s and the cofferdam washed out during the intense storms of 1986.

- Transfer of ownership of the Auburn dam site and several miles of upstream American River canyon from the federal government to the state of California, for the express purpose of building a multi-purpose dam that provides flood control, generates electricity and stores water.

- The addition of five new outlets to Folsom Dam's existing complement of eight outlets.

Sacramento has a 77-year level of flood protection, meaning that the odds of a disastrous flood-control failure are one in 77 each year.

Doolittle contends his proposed flood-control dam will increase that protection to about the 127-year level, and the new Folsom Dam outlets will take it up to approximately the 160-year level.

(Flood protection levels should not be considered static measurements. They are regularly reassessed as hydrology records change. Thus, two years ago, the stepped release plan now embodied in Matsui's bill was thought to give Sacramento a 235-year level of protection. The 1997 storms resulted in a reduction of that estimate to between 145- and 160-year protection.)

The measure's cost, Doolittle contends, is \$354 million and would take an estimated three years to complete. Doolittle is unsure whether that time period accounts for tight federal budget limits.

While the total amount of flood protection Doolittle claims for his bill is similar to what Matsui claims for his legislation, there is a wide discrepancy between the amount of analysis that supports each lawmaker's assertions.

Matsui and his allies can cite stacks of studies, compiled at the cost of millions of dollars, pinpointing how American River levees would be raised and at what expense, how much flood protection they will provide, their impacts and mitigation efforts.

There is nothing like that behind Doolittle's flood control dam proposal, which instead is based largely on one brief letter each from the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Neither agency conducted extensive analyses on the dam idea, its impacts or costs before replying in mid-June to urgent requests from Doolittle for information.

Thus, there are few specifics available on his vision — something critics charge is a fatal flaw.

Doolittle has added to the uncertainty by referring to his proposal as a permanent cofferdam — a contradiction in terms because cofferdams by definition are temporary, are designed to fail in extreme storms, and are not assigned flood control responsibilities.

There also is ambiguity on the height of the dam. Doolittle aides say the old earthen cofferdam was 220 feet tall and the new proposal is for a partially or totally concrete structure about 255 feet tall, enough to impound at least 180,000 acre-feet of water.

Tom Aiken, the Reclamation Bureau's Central California area manager, said the old dam was 257 feet tall and may have to reach 290 feet to impound as much water as Doolittle wants.

Doolittle insists Highway 49 would not have to be relocated and its existing bridge replaced because, he contends, the bridge was inundated only three times in 11 years while the old cofferdam was in place.

But California Department of Transportation records show the bridge was closed because of flooding five times between 1980 and 1986, the longest being 52 days in 1986 when water pooled behind the old cofferdam severely damaged the highway. A Caltrans spokeswoman said the agency would insist on a relocated road and a new bridge if a dam the size Doolittle now proposes were built.

A new bridge and highway would cost tens of millions of dollars — Matsui contends \$140 million — but no one knows for sure because the matter has not been studied recently.

Still, some data on the possible consequences of Doolittle's proposal do exist. The Reclamation Bureau, for example, holds records on the old cofferdam's operation. And in the early 1980s, it studied "armoring" the downstream face of the structure with concrete or adding a concrete spillway.

Doolittle's bill also calls for a six-month study on the dam's feasibility, though Reclamation Bureau officials say that is the bare minimum to finish design work and could not include environmental impact analysis or what would probably be a lengthy period of public comment.

Despite the hurdles, the Auburn dam concept appeals to Aiken. "Right now, we've got no control over anything coming down the north and middle forks of the American River, he said. "Anything coming down ... we have to accept into Folsom (Lake)." Some sort of dam at Auburn "would give us a lot of flexibility," Aiken added.

Legislation entering a key phase

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The next two or three weeks may be crucial in this year's struggle over flood protection for Sacramento.

In the House, the full Resources Committee on Wednesday is scheduled to consider flood control legislation by Rep. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, that is a rival to another measure by Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento.

Doolittle's bill would authorize transfer of the site of the proposed Auburn dam to the state of California, construction of a

smaller flood control dam near Auburn and modifications to Folsom Dam.

Matsui's bill is under consideration in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee as part of a larger water resources development bill.

As happened two years ago when the Auburn dam proposal was under review, the issue may skip the subcommittee level and be voted on directly by the full transportation panel, which is not set to meet until the week of July 20.

Matsui's legislation would authorize raising and strengthening downstream American River

levees, upgrading flood control devices on the Sacramento River and the Yolo Bypass, and modifying Folsom Dam.

Meanwhile, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., is working on another flood-protection bill that would follow the concepts behind the levee-raising plan in Matsui's measure but would differ in some details.

Her plan, on which aides would not elaborate, may be included in the Senate's water resources development legislation that is set for consideration by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in the next week or two.

Few partisans in the flood control battle disagree with Aiken on that point. The next question, then, is: Will Congress approve a dam? Doolittle's critics, citing the experience of 1992 and 1996, say no.

"No engineer will say they don't think a dam is a technically superior approach to raising levees," said Butch Hodgkins, director of the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency. "That I think is not the real choice. The real choice here is do you ... move for-

ward with the plan that will give you the highest level of protection that Congress might approve."

Doolittle contends the House can be persuaded.

"I don't think a majority of the House is opposed to a project just because a component of it is a detention dam that doesn't hold water 99 percent of the time," he said. For critics to claim Congress won't approve a dam "is not a true picture of the situation as we know it."

Fears about threats aired by downstream residents

Continued from page A1

element of legislation by Matsui and co-sponsored by Rep. Vic Fazio, D-West Sacramento, that would more than double Sacramento's current flood protection. Specifically, the bill, HR 3698, would authorize a version of the 1996 "stepped release plan" by:

- Enlarging the eight existing outlets in Folsom Dam and punching five new ones into it.
- Increasing American River levees' height from just upstream of Goethe Park to the Cal Expo area.
- Widening the Sacramento Weir – essentially a huge gate above the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers – so more Sacramento River water can be detoured into the Yolo Bypass.

Sacramento has a 77-year level of flood protection meaning that the odds of a disastrous flood-control failure are one in 77 each year. The American River levee work would increase that protection to about the 125-year level, and the Folsom Dam changes would take that to around the 155-year level, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The price tag for Matsui's bill is \$450 million, and the work would take nine years to complete – a time period that accounts for tight federal budget limits according to the corps and Matsui aides.

The Folsom Dam modifications have been largely ignored in the wrangling between Doolittle and Matsui, since both support the concept and have included only slightly different versions in their bills.

Where the lawmakers diverge is on what to do about American River levees.

The purpose of raising them, as Matsui proposes, is to permit more water to flow down the American River than can be done now without lapping over the top of or blowing out the existing levees.

The levees are designed to handle 115,000 cubic feet per second even though they safely conveyed 134,000 cfs, the highest level ever recorded, during the huge 1986 storms. Workers recently began pouring a vertical wall of concrete down the middle of miles of levees to strengthen them.

By going another step and raising the levees with dirt and impermeable clay, flood control experts contend the levees could safely pass as much as 145,000 cfs, enough to withstand the biggest expected flows.

If the need arises, the levees could handle 180,000 cubic feet with 3 feet of space between the water surface and the levee crests, the corps says.

Once the water reaches the confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers, as much as 145,000 cfs would actually flow up the Sacramento River, into the widened weir, and then into the Yolo Bypass, flood control officials say.

Thus, the Sacramento River downstream from Sacramento would see little water-level increase unless a series of extreme storms necessitated releasing much more than 145,000 cfs down the American River for sustained periods, corps officials contend.

"We designed it so there was no additional water going down the Sacramento River," said Bob Childs, American River project manager for the corps.

Officials of some downstream Sacramento River communities contend higher American River flows will threaten their areas and require as much as \$1 billion in more flood-control work. Doolittle agrees, though he called the cost estimate "off the cuff."

Childs acknowledges the need for more analysis on costs and downstream impacts because the corps did much of its research in 1995 and 1996 not on raising levees but on the Auburn dam, the plan then backed by the region but which Congress defeated. Still, corps officials insist higher levees can be reliable.

Jeff Mount, a University of California, Davis, geology professor who has studied flooding issues and dislikes levees, agrees the corps can do the job. Yet he also notes that generally speaking, the higher the levees, "the more unstable they are."

Doolittle and other critics argue that safe, higher levees cannot be built. They note correctly, according to experts, that Matsui's plan would maximize the current system's flood protection potential. If a large enough series of storms parked over the floodplain, Doolittle contends, Sacramento would be awash.

Further, Doolittle points to the comments of a corps official at a hearing in May, who said there is only a 60 percent chance that the higher levees will withstand flows of 180,000 cfs.

But Matsui cites subsequent remarks at the hearing by the same official, who said he in fact was referring to the corps' ability to accurately predict the frequency of storms big enough to send 180,000 cfs down the river. Matsui says the reliability of higher levees to pass 180,000 cfs is more like 95 percent.

Whatever the case, Matsui argues that his proposal is the only one that has a legitimate shot at passing in Congress, given the defeat of prior dam plans in 1992 and 1996. "We need to do this. There's really no other option available. Auburn dam is not going to be built anytime soon," he said. "We'd like to get to 200- to 300-year protection," Matsui added, "but that is not in the cards at this time and won't be in the foreseeable future."

Proposed flood control scenarios

Here is a look at the rival plans proposed by Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento, and Rep. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin.

The Matsui plan

1 Would raise American River levees an average of 2½ feet from Cal Expo to about a mile upriver from Goethe Park. (This includes a stretch of about a half-mile adjacent to the Butterfield area where levees would be raised about 5 feet. There are also areas below Nimbus Dam where a small stretch of levees would be raised, and a flood wall built to protect the Nimbus Fish Hatchery.) The levee work would allow as much as 180,000 cubic feet per second of water to flow down the river, with 3 feet of space between the water surface and the top of the levees. The highest flow recorded in modern times is 134,000 cfs in 1986. This work also would involve raising the Howe Avenue and Guy West bridges, and modifications to a railroad bridge.

2 Would modify Folsom Dam by enlarging the eight existing outlets in the dam from 5 feet wide by 9 feet high to 6 feet wide by 12 feet high and by adding five new larger outlets to the dam. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would determine the feasibility and impact of both projects. (The idea of lowering the dam's existing main spillways has been practically shelved because it is opposed by area residents who fear the closure of Folsom Dam Road that would be required by such work.)

3 Would improve downstream facilities by widening the Sacramento Weir and Sacramento Bypass by 1,000 feet. This would allow 145,000 cfs to flow into the Yolo Bypass. In the Yolo Bypass itself, 25.6 miles of levees would be raised, 38.2 miles would be strengthened and two miles of new levees would be built on several tributaries that flow into the bypass.

S These and other, minor elements would cost an estimated \$450 million, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency and Matsui. Critics contend that figure does not include unknown costs for mitigating possible impacts along the Sacramento River south of Sacramento.

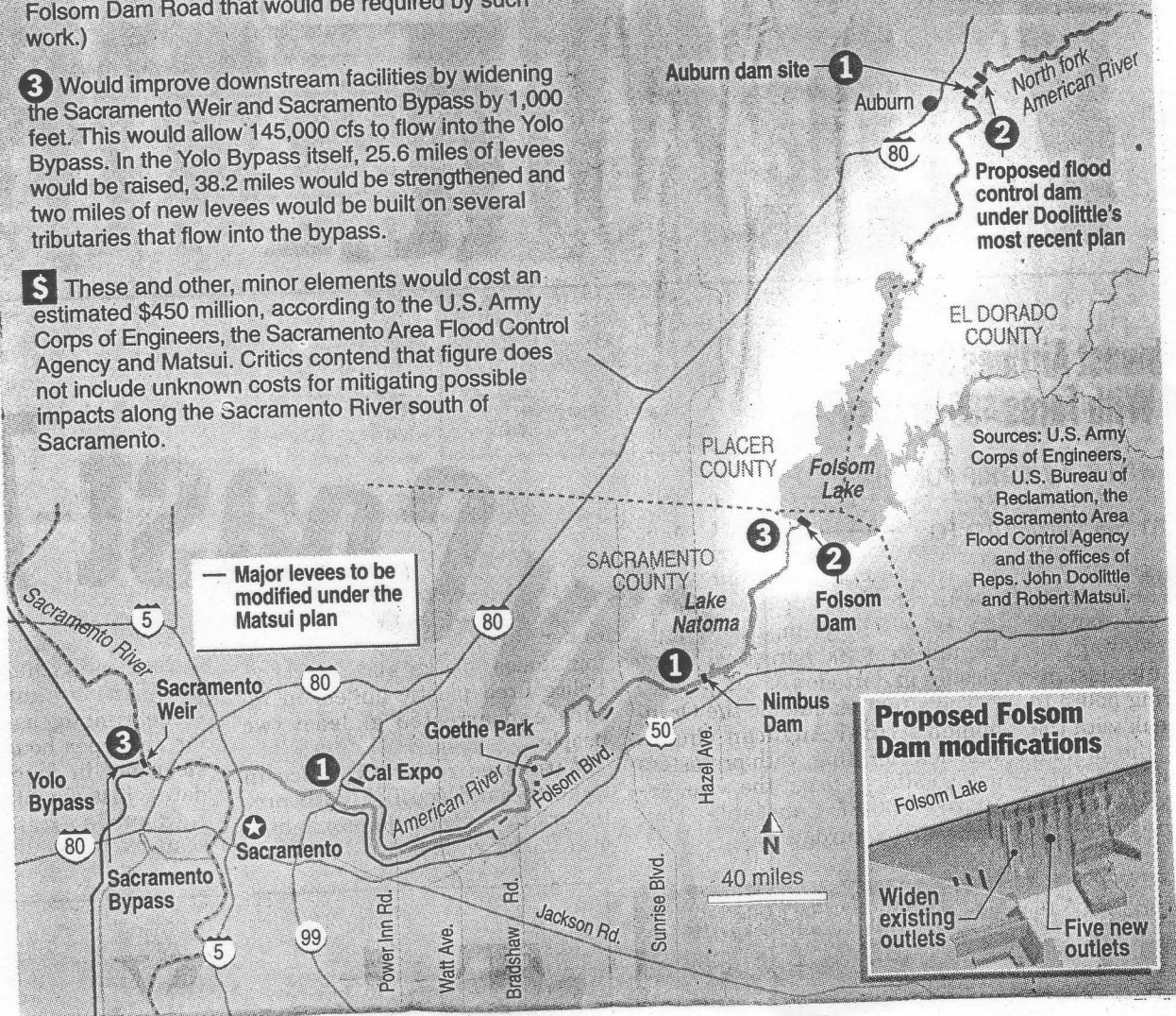
The Doolittle plan

1 Would transfer the site of the Auburn dam and several miles of land along the north fork of the American River from the federal government to **Exhibit X-31 California** at no cost for the purpose of building a multipurpose dam that provides flood control, supplies water and generates electrical power. The governor would have to agree and the state could not use the land for anything else, lest it revert back to federal control. There is no deadline for state action.

2 Would require the federal government to build a flood control dam where a cofferdam stood between 1975 and 1986, just upstream of the site of the proposed Auburn dam. The flood control dam would be at least 255 feet tall — and possibly as high as 290 feet — and be able to impound 180,000 acre-feet of water. It might resemble the old cofferdam, which was built of compacted dirt and designed to fail in a heavy storm. But the proposed facility also would have a concrete spillway or a concrete skin facing downstream, would not be designed to fail, and could not be expanded or converted into a larger, multipurpose dam. It also would detour the American River around the Auburn dam site. (Neither the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation nor the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has fully analyzed this proposal, so exact details are unavailable.)

3 Would modify Folsom Dam by adding new outlets to the dam.

S These elements would cost an estimated \$354 million, according to Doolittle. Critics contend that figure ignores as much as \$140 million in other possible costs for building a new bridge for Highway 49 and for environmental mitigation.



The Sacramento Bee

OPINION

Let them vote House stalls SAFCA's flood plan

Leadership in the House of Representatives sadly threatens to deny the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency one of democracy's basic rights — the right to a vote on its proposal to double flood protection for 400,000 Sacramento-area residents. Delayed indefinitely are House deliberations on a bill containing new storm protection projects not only for Sacramento, but also for communities throughout the nation, from Grand Forks, N.D., to Lake Talbot Island, Fla.

This is a new problem for SAFCA. The old problem was that the House was all too willing to vote down (in 1992 and again in 1996) Sacramento's proposal to build a new flood-control dam in the American River canyon near Auburn. Facing that reality, SAFCA wisely delivered this year to Congress a community compromise with widespread support in the floodplain that avoids the congressionally contentious dam and focuses on downstream improvements — more flood release outlets on the face of Folsom dam matched with higher levees to handle those releases.

A Senate committee Wednesday, reviewing SAFCA's plan along with other community flood projects in the 1998 Water Resources Development Act, passed the bill unanimous-

ly. Meanwhile in the House, Rocklin Rep. John Doolittle leads a few misguided fellow Republicans who actively oppose SAFCA's plan because it doesn't center on a dam, which remains a deal-killer. Because of their pressure, House Speaker Newt Gingrich's staff has signaled reluctance to allow the full House to vote on any flood protection bill that includes the SAFCA plan, which appears to have the votes where it would first be heard, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Thus the Doolittle political solution, for now, is to delay deliberations.

It's not surprising that the House leadership would prefer to avoid confrontation with Doolittle, a partisan colleague. SAFCA, however, has already delivered a compromise to Congress. Watering down SAFCA's plan would leave the region too vulnerable to flooding and force Sacramento to return to Congress seeking more help in the future. That's no solution.

A dose of democracy is the answer. Let Doolittle advance his own new idea of a down-sized dam at Auburn. Let SAFCA advance its plan. And let the House vote. That way, Sacramento and dozens of other communities throughout the nation can identify who in Congress will support or oppose achievable projects to provide Americans a better chance at surviving future storms.

LOS ANGELES TIMES EDITORIALS



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Dangerous Game of Dams

Rising in the Sierra Nevada west of Lake Tahoe, the American River is barely 100 miles long but is one of the nation's most historic. John Marshall's discovery in the south fork at Coloma in 1848 touched off the famed Gold Rush. Gold financed the building of Sacramento, at the confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers. Today, the American is one of the most popular rivers for white water rafting in the United States. But during the first three days of January 1997, it was a roaring, angry thing that threatened to inundate the state Capitol, downtown and the homes of 400,000 Sacramento residents.

An incredible single storm dumped more than 30 inches of rain on the American's watershed, filling Folsom Reservoir to the brim even though dam operators were dumping water downstream as fast as they could. The forecast called for another day of heavy rain, and potential disaster. But suddenly the storm veered away. Later, state water resources chief David N. Kennedy said, "We were very apprehensive about the Sacramento area for about eight hours."

Apprehension about the area's safety remains, but attempts to provide greater flood protection are bottled up in Congress at the behest of a single Northern California congressman. The longer the project is delayed, the greater the chance a flood could batter the city.

The construction of Folsom Dam just above Sacramento in the 1950s and levee work brought the city an estimated 125-year level of flood protection, above the accepted national standard of 100 years. But the level

was revised to just 77 years following the rains of 1997.

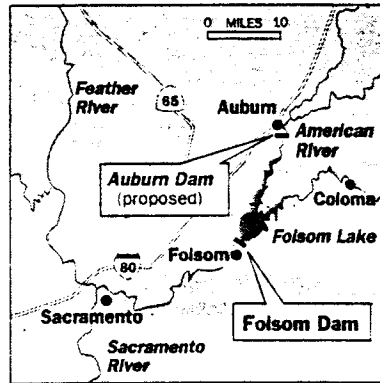
After flooding in 1986, area officials urged construction of a flood-control dam on the American River near Auburn, 35 miles above Sacramento. But the Auburn Dam was soundly defeated in Congress, both in 1992 and 1996. Virtually everyone agrees Auburn Dam will never be revived, for reasons of cost, environmental protection and earthquake safety.

Now the region, with a few exceptions, has united behind the next best solution—to reconfigure Folsom Dam so that it can release more water more quickly and to raise and strengthen levees, at a cost of \$465 million. With the backing of Reps. Robert T. Matsui and Vic Fazio, Sacramento area Democrats, the project would be authorized by the biennial

omnibus flood control project bill. The measure passed the Senate but has come to a jarring halt in the House.

The reason is Rep. John Doolittle (R-Rocklin), chairman of the House water resources subcommittee and a confidant of Speaker Newt Gingrich. Doolittle remains devoted to a \$1-billion Auburn Dam, which would be in his district. He fears that if \$465 million is approved for Folsom, there never will be a chance to build Auburn. At his behest, Gingrich has kept the bill locked in committee, a rare move in the House that threatens to kill the bill for this year.

Gingrich should think of California's capital under water. With that in mind, the speaker surely will abandon this dangerous gambit immediately.



Los Angeles Times

The Oakland Tribune

OUR OPINION

AUG 30 1998

Let's have a vote on our water issues

PRESSURE from a few California House Republicans has apparently persuaded Speaker Newt Gingrich to stall a bill for \$1 billion worth of state water and flood control projects because they can't get their way with their pet Auburn Dam project.

Why should this concern us in the Bay Area? Well, for one thing, a \$202 million upgrade for Oakland Harbor that has obvious benefits for our economy is indefinitely delayed.

With our economy, jobs and quality of life to some extent dependent on wise water decisions, we think delaying debating and voting on vital water and flood control projects is unreasonable.

Obstructing the bill proposed by Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento, are mainly John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, and Richard Pombo, R-Tracy. They argue that it reduces Auburn Dam's chances of being built.

Pombo sees Auburn as a solution to Sam Joaquin County's water problems. Doolittle has a counter-proposal bill for the dam.

Meanwhile, Gingrich's staff has apparently acceded to Doolittle's ploy to hold up the committee process so that no flood protection plan that doesn't include Auburn Dam gets to the House floor.

Clearly, Doolittle is concerned that Matsui's bill has enough votes to pass a committee hearing.

One objection

In particular, Doolittle objects to the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency's plan to spend \$464 million modifying Folsom Dam and to raise levees downstream. This is expected to double Sacramento's level of flood protection that stands at only 77 years now. Over a 30-year mortgage, this means there is one chance in three that a Sacramento area homeowner's property is going to be damaged by flooding.

This is simply not enough protection.

In a 100-year flood, the Army Corps of Engineers estimates that damage in the region will be \$7 billion.

The problem for the agency is that it agrees that the dam is the best long-term solution since it provides a 400- to 500-

year level of protection. One of its biggest drawbacks, however, is its cost estimated at \$1 billion. The question is who's going to pay that price?

Not Congress apparently. It has already rejected the dam twice — in 1992 and in 1996 — and political realities indicate that there aren't enough votes for it now.

Wise choice

We think the agency made a wise choice by approaching Congress this year with a compromise, even one it concedes is "the next best plan" to Auburn.

The point is, it's viable. Moreover, it comes with support not only from upstream and downstream but of environmentalists throughout the state who were rabidly opposed to the dam. Further-

more, the Corps that drew up the plan in the first place likes it. The Corps says it will reduce the risk of flooding in any year to approxi-

mately one chance in 150.

The environmental community has apparently signed off on the compromise because it isn't the dam they hated. Like Doolittle, they apparently see it as nailing the coffin on Auburn.

A Senate committee late last month reviewed the agency's plan, along with other water and flood projects in the 1998 Water Resources Development Act, and unanimously passed the bill proposed by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif.

With the House due back from recess on Sept. 8 and scheduled to end for the year on Oct. 5, timing is of the essence.

We say that the House should conduct an open and honest debate and vote on the merits of the Matsui bill (HR3698) and on Doolittle's bill (HR4111) before it concludes its business.

That way, we in the Bay Area and in 30 other states whose water and flood control projects are caught up in the stalling tactics can learn the pros and cons.

We support open discussion so that all sides have the opportunity to speak, and the public hears all the important information.

Besides, it's the democratic thing to do.

*Our economy, jobs and quality of
life are to some extent dependent
on wise water decisions.*

B6 Friday, October 2, 1998

The Sacramento Bee

Waiting for Doolittle

Corps of Engineers flood compromise satisfies concerns

Rocklin Rep. John Doolittle and the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency spent the summer painting one another as reluctant to compromise on the topic of flood control for the state capital. Doolittle sought to portray as fair a plan that would barely lift Sacramento above the federal minimum level of 100-year flood protection by modifying Folsom Dam so it could release more water earlier in storms. SAFCA wisely stuck to its own plan that doubles that improvement by both modifying Folsom and raising downstream levees.

Congress may have less than two weeks left to pass a bill with flood protection improvements nationwide; members are understandably eager for Doolittle and SAFCA to settle the dispute before the lawmakers settle it for them. A new idea floated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers offers the Doolittle camp a tantalizing compromise that has huge new gains for his foothills district, particularly Folsom. He should seize this opportunity as a way to meet his objectives as well as SAFCA's.

In hopes of finding an engineering solution to the political deadlock, the corps dusted off some old reports and rekindled a plan to raise Folsom Dam. A major increase in height for the dam has considerable drawbacks; the dam would have to be drained one summer for foundation work that, if it weren't completed before the rains, would leave the capital at incredible risk. But a modest rise — somewhere in the neighborhood of seven to 10 feet

— is achievable without the expensive and problematic foundation work. Coupled with flood-gate modifications, that package could provide a similar level of flood protection to SAFCA's original plan, and at less cost.

For Doolittle, such a plan eliminates his major objection to the SAFCA plan — an overdependence on moving higher flood flows between higher levees. The flood release strategy under the corps' compromise does not involve these higher flows or higher levees. Even better for Doolittle, the compromise offers a tangible benefit for his district. The road over Folsom Dam, vulnerable to closures for dam repairs, would be replaced by a free-standing bridge. This would guarantee predictable commutes for thousands of residents. And none of these increments in flood protection preclude a dam at Auburn in the future.

SAFCA's plan, with remarkable local and congressional support, remains a reasonable proposal. So does the corps' alternate suggestion of raising Folsom, building a new bridge road and modifying the floodgates. The corps has found a way for the local congressional delegation to discover common ground without sacrificing Sacramento's need to double the existing level of flood protection. Doolittle can bring a quarter-billion-dollar project home to his district. Oddly, he hasn't yet seized the moment, and his silence is deafening. There is nothing more to fight over. It is beyond time to get on with protecting 400,000 residents of the state capital who live in harm's way.

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★ ★ Saturday, October 3, 1998

METRO

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Flood plan's outlook dim this year

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - With only a week or so left before Congress adjourns, it appears that efforts to improve Sacramento's flood-control system are at or very near an end this year.

The months-old stalemate between Reps. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento, and John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, continues with

no conclusion in sight despite a recent trial balloon floated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that would abandon the idea of raising American River levees in favor of adding height to Folsom Dam.

The situation could change quickly in the coming days if the two lawmakers forge an agreement. But with so little time left in this congressional session, and with Congress focused on annual spending bills and the controversy sur-

rounding President Clinton, the prospects for progress on flood control seem bleak.

"If compromises aren't made, then nothing will happen," said Scott Brenner, spokesman for Rep. Bud Shuster, R-Pa., chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. "We continue to look for solutions."

"There appears to be no movement on the issue," said Jim Berard, spokesman for Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn., top

Democrat on the transportation bill. "Time is running out on the session and chances appear slim that there will be some movement on it this year."

Matsui warned against predicaments there will be no action on flood-control improvements.

"It's still hanging out there," he said Friday. "I find the Folsom proposal is very

Please see FLOOD, page B4

44 Saturday, October 3, 1998 * *

► METRO/

Flood: Doolittle skeptical of Folsom Dam proposal

Continued from page B1
intriguing and one that we have a few days to explore. . . . It appears to make a lot of sense."

But Matsui noted he is not ready to endorse the corps' proposal on Folsom Dam, which the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency backs.

Doolittle is much less enthusiastic about the idea, although he is not prepared to oppose it, said his chief of staff, David Lopez.

"What SAFCA has come to us with floods our constituents' property, ruins the beaches and recreation at Folsom Lake and provides no additional water supply," Lopez said. "So it's not anything we would be terribly interested in."

For weeks, Shuster's committee has been ready to vote on the 1998 Water Resources Development Act, a billion dollar-plus grab bag of flood control, shoreline and other water resources projects that Congress considers every two years.

The Senate version of the legislation, which includes a proposal offered earlier this year by Matsui and SAFCA to raise levees and punch new outlets in Folsom Dam, is ready for a vote on the Senate floor. But Shuster's committee is stymied. Its Democrats and some Republicans support raising levees.

Doolittle ardently opposes that language and won a promise from House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., to block the bill if it reaches the House floor with the levee-raising provision. Given the political landscape, Shuster opted against presenting the bill for a committee vote.

That stalemate has continued since late July. But hopes were raised last week when it was disclosed that the head of the Corps of Engineers, Joseph Westphal, had broached the idea of raising Folsom Dam by at least 6½ feet instead of increasing the height of levees.

Since then, SAFCA officials have pushed the proposal and Matsui has suggested some changes. But Doolittle has inched further and further away, while not dismissing it entirely.

Lopez said Doolittle is not opposed to an in-depth study of raising Folsom Dam. But, he added, the congressman will fight language that would authorize the study and allow the corps to commence construction without seeking approval through another vote by Congress.

Lopez said he toured Folsom Lake this week and concluded that a few residential properties would be threatened and the beaches at Granite Bay and Beal's Point would be inundated.



Rep. Bud Shuster

The fight has tied up a huge water bill in his committee.

"If SAFCA wants to proceed with this, we should study the issue and bring it back to Congress," he said.

But that is unacceptable to Matsui, who wants a bill authorizing construction that would at least double Sacramento's current 77-year-level of flood protection.

"We can't leave these people at risk by doing a partial protection," he said. "That's just not acceptable. . . . We've got to get an authorization that gives us a certain level of protection."

As has been the case for the past several weeks, the two congressmen remain far apart, said Ronald Stork with Friends of the River. Whether a resolution will be forced this year by other lawmakers concerned about the fate of their own water projects is questionable.

"Eventually, the country is going to tell Mr. Doolittle to get a life and let Sacramento go," Stork said. "But whether or not it happens in this Congress or not is difficult to say. But as this Congress wanes, it becomes more likely that it will be in the next Congress."

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Doolittle, Matsui haggle as Senate OKs water bill

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - Negotiations between two Sacramento congressmen over improving their region's flood control system continued Friday as the Senate approved a water resources bill that would raise American River levees.

The talks, which focused on alternative methods of doubling Sacramento's currently inadequate level of flood protection, have been intensifying over the past few days, but as of Friday night, had produced no agreement.

Congress may adjourn as early as Monday, increasing the pressure on Reps. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, and Robert Matsui, D-

Sacramento, to reach an accord.

The Senate, acting late Thursday night, quickly passed its version of the 1998 water resources development act by unanimous consent - a parliamentary maneuver that does not require a recorded vote.

The bill includes a \$464.6 million provision championed by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., to raise American River levees and to add more outlets to Folsom Dam and enlarge its existing ones.

"The flood protection plan in (the measure) builds upon a growing community consensus for the most effective plan for flood protection in Sacramento," Boxer said.

The House version of the bill, however, is in limbo as Matsui and Doolittle search for a resolu-



Barbara Boxer

The senator championed a provision to raise American River levees.

tion to their months-old stalemate over flood control.

Doolittle won a promise from House Speaker Newt Gingrich to block consideration of the House water resources bill if it contains language similar to Boxer's, a version that is being pushed by Matsui and the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency.

Matsui and Doolittle have met in recent weeks to discuss another plan that drops the levee-raising idea and instead would raise Folsom Dam by at least 6½ feet. But they have not signed off on a final deal.