

## Who'll pay bill for Auburn dam study? Stay tuned

**David Whitney -- Bee Washington Bureau**

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WASHINGTON -- Costly studies for big federal water projects are supposed to be funded partially by local governments that would benefit from the projects, but the studies planned for a multipurpose dam at Auburn may turn out to be an exception.

Under laws that have guided work on the American River since 1993, the local share of an estimated \$20 million in preliminary engineering and design studies for the controversial dam won't become due until construction begins, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

That means if local taxpayers ultimately balk at the costs of an Auburn dam, the federal government could end up footing the bill for the studies.

This is just one issue raised by a provision to a 2007 spending bill approved this week by the House Appropriations Committee that earmarks \$3 million to update a 1996 Auburn dam feasibility study.

The provision was inserted into the energy and water development spending bill by Rep. John Doolittle, R-Roseville, who is the leading congressional champion of the dam.

The bill is expected to come to a vote on the House floor next week.

The study is the precursor to a federal money stream necessary for pre-engineering and design work on the dam, which so far does not have a local sponsor willing to assume the local costs.

Doolittle and other dam advocates think the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency should be the sponsor.

"Because communities in the Sacramento floodplain are far and away the greatest beneficiaries of an Auburn dam, it would make most sense for SAFCA to be the local sponsor of the project," said Doolittle aide Brian Jensen.

But SAFCA wants no part of the project, saying its hands are tied with costly work to rebuild and strengthen levees on the American and Sacramento rivers and make improvements to Folsom Dam.

SAFCA officials say the planned improvements will give the Sacramento region protection against a 200-year storm, one with a 1-in-200 chance of occurring in a given year.

"Before we could contemplate investing in further studies on an Auburn dam, we need to be sure we can at least provide parity around the city on a 200-year level," said Stein Buer, the flood control agency's executive director.

"It may be a very wise thing to do in the future, but we can't afford to do that now."

Another regional group, the American River Authority, is considering serving as local sponsor of an Auburn dam, using revenue bonds to finance what it thinks will be a 25 percent share of the pre-construction studies and a 35 percent share of construction.

Placer County Supervisor Bruce Kranz, who heads the authority, said he would expect SAFCA to pick up local costs of the flood-control benefits Sacramento would get.

"It is our contention that if we make this dam multipurpose, the flood-control benefits have to be borne by SAFCA," he said.

"If we're building a dam that gets (Sacramento) 400-year flood protection, they'll be on the hook for that."

All this leaves the Corps of Engineers wondering what will come next.

Jason Fanselau, the corps' spokesman in Sacramento, said when the spending bill is enacted "one of our very first steps would be to try to identify a local sponsor."

But Fanselau said it is possible the study would be done at federal expense under a 1993 directive that says a sponsor doesn't have to come up with its share until construction on an Auburn dam occurs.

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