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Wednesday, November 16, 2005 Last modified: [Sunday, November 13, 2005 1:57 AM PST](#)

Controversial Auburn Dam has fifty-year pedigree

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The much-debated, long-delayed Auburn dam has been taken off the political back burner by U.S. Rep. John Doolittle, R-Roseville, whose efforts have provided \$1 million for a new study looking at costs. Here's a timeline on events leading up to the latest chapter in the continuing saga:

1955

Flooding spurs formation of Auburn Dam Committee, a local group formed to boost the project. The December flood sees Folsom Reservoir grow from 200,000 acre-feet to 1 million, threatening Sacramento. Auburn Journal Publisher Bill Cassidy, Placer Savings founder Paul Claiborne and James Carr, an official with the Sacramento Municipal Utility District, helps write the original bill and submit it to Congressman Clair Engle.

1956

Engle introduces legislation into Congress to authorize the Auburn dam project. The Placer County Board of Supervisors endorses the drive.

1959

After Engle moves up to the U.S. Senate, U.S. Rep. Harold "Bizz" Johnson introduces legislation in the House to authorize Auburn dam construction.

1964

Christmas week floods fill Folsom Dam in two days and pose a Sacramento flood threat from spill over the top.

1965

Congress authorizes the dam as an integral part of the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Valley Project's flood-control effort. Water and hydroelectric power generation are also part of the package.

1968

The first ceremonial shovel of dirt dug out, signaling pre-construction work at the dam site just outside Auburn. Plans calls for a dam 700 feet high with 2.5 million acre-feet capacity. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$428 million.

1972

Three environmental groups, including the Save the American River Association, sue the Bureau of



Longtime Auburn Dam backer Harold "Bizz" Johnson, in white jacket, arrives at the construction site for a look-see with a clutch of political associates in tow in 1972. With Johnson, who served as the area's congressman until 1980, were, from left, congressmen James Abourezk, D-S.D., Teno Roncalio, D-Wyo., and Abraham Kazen Jr., D-Texas. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation file photo

Reclamation over what they say is inadequate environmental documentation.

1973

The year originally estimated for completion of an Auburn dam.

1974

Federal judge rules environmental documentation inadequate but allows construction to continue. Amended environmental documents accepted later in the year.

1975

Oroville earthquake sparks earthquake concerns and an Association of Engineering Geologists report stating Auburn dam design would be unsafe if moderate earthquake occurs. At the time, nearly 300 people are working on the project.

1976

Association of Engineering Geologists warns failure of Auburn dam would send 100-foot wall of water at Sacramento.

1977

President Jimmy Carter's Hit List comes out with plans to cut \$39.7 million from the budget previously earmarked for Auburn dam. He backs down later in the year.

1980

Dam shuts down construction after more than \$200 million spent on project.

1984

Environmental groups propose National Recreation Area status to protect the north and middle forks of the American River from inundation and construction of Auburn dam.

1986

Heavy rains spark new study that drops Sacramento's level of flood protection from a catastrophic flood once every 125 years to 78 years.

1990

Strong Auburn dam advocate John Doolittle jumps from state government to Congress, representing the Auburn area.

1992

Auburn dam bill defeated in Congress on a 2-1 vote, forcing further study on flood control and water supply alternatives.

1996

A second bill in four years for an Auburn dam fails in Congress. Dam opponent Friends of the River and others find federal support to upgrade Sacramento's flood-control levees.

2001

Federal funding and support comes for tunnel closure and restoration of the streambed on the American River through the Auburn dam site.

2002

Work begins on Placer County Water Agency pump project and river restoration.

2003

Agreement reached on federal project to raise Folsom dam to increase downstream flood protection. Total impact would be to raise flood safety level to one catastrophic flood every 200 years.

2005

\$1 million authorized for new study to determine cost to construct the Auburn Dam.

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